CASE STUDIES IN SEVENTEENTH CENTURY ENTHUSIASM
ESPECIALLY THE RANTERS

by

Gordon Frederick Ellens

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
under the Joint Committee on Instruction
Columbia University

1968

ABSTRACT

CASE STUDIES IN SEVENTEENTH CENTURY ENTHUSIASM ESPECIALLY THE RANTERS

Gordon Frederick Ellens

The focal point of this group of case studies in seventeenth century English enthusiasm lies in an amorphous group of people known to their contemporaries as "Ranters." This term originally referred to exuberant preachers and is used in that sense in the sixteen forties but by the sixteen fifties the term is applied to raucous and rowdy fellows. In particular, the word is used of folk whom we have characterized in this work as religious mis-fits and "drop-outs," people who belonged to none of the multitudinous yet recognizable sects but who congregated together to drink and to blaspheme, and some freely to engage in sexual license.

Our study of the Ranters themselves takes the form of four case studies of men who were well-known as Ranters. We have called them "arch-Ranters." Their names are Joseph Salmon, Jacob Bauthumley, Abiezer Coppe, and Laurence Clarkson or Claxton.

The immediate background to this remarkable outbreak of social misbehavior appears to be provided by Anabaptist

antinomianism perhaps imported into England by a group of enthusiasts called "Familists." But other factors at work include that of the introversion typical of "inward religion," the shattering impact of the "New Philosophy" of the seventeenth century, and the widespread uncertainty and melancholia of that period. These themes are explored at length in the first part of this work.

Thus, we have attempted in this disquisition to explore the Ranter mind--to penetrate the thought and feeling of the Ranter--as well as to examine the theological implications of Ranter beliefs and disbeliefs. It is mainly with regard to this that we have presented and explored the beliefs and attitudes of persons other than Ranters, whose thinking provides us with a key to the understanding of the Ranter himself. But in addition to this, we have tried to make a contribution to the understanding of these other parties also. Apart from the Familists, the groups principally mentioned are the Cambridge Platonists, the English Behmenists, and the Antinomians.

Please Note:

This is a blank page.
Filmed as received.

University Microfilms.

Frontispiece

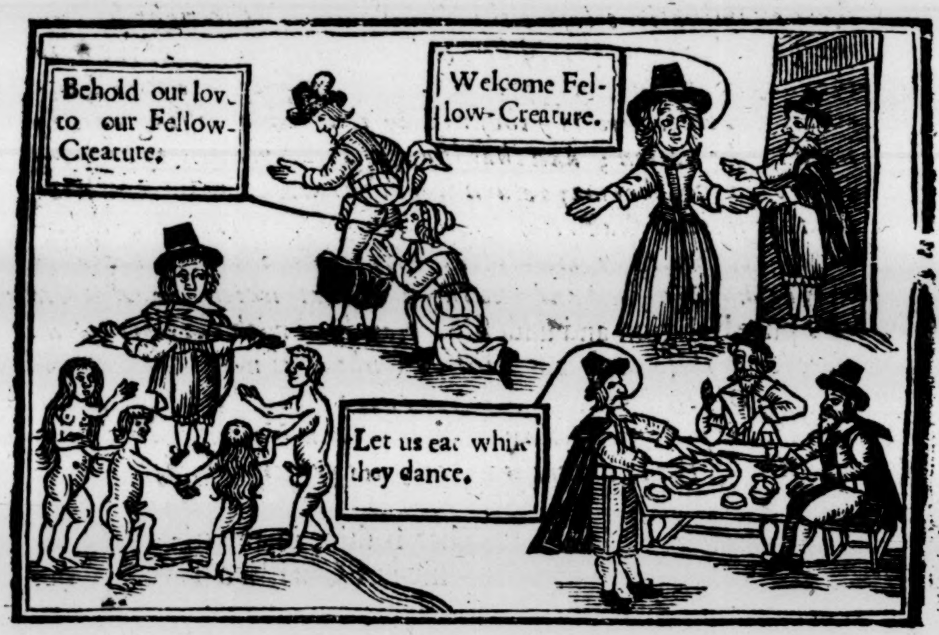
11

The Ranters Ranting:

WITH

J. P.

The apprehending, examinations, and confeſſion of *John Collins, I. Shakeſpear, Tho. Wiberton,* and five more which are to anſwer the next Seſſions. And ſeverall ſongs or catches, which were ſung at their meetings. Alſo their ſeveral kinds of mirth, and dancing. Their blaſphemous opinions. Their belief concerning heaven and hell. And the reaſon why one of the ſame opinion cut off the heads of his own mother and brother. Set forth for the further diſcovery of this ungodly crew.


Behold our love to our Fellow-Creature.
Welcome Fellow-Creature.
Let us eat while they dance.

LONDON
Printed by *B. Alſop*, 1650.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter Page

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS vi

INTRODUCTION 1

PART I

I. THE RANTERS RANTING 8

A Short List of . . . Anti-Ranter Literature . . . 70

II. THE FAMILISTS OF LOVE 72

Introduction 72

Appendix to Chapter II 129

Bibliography of 16th and 17th Century Works 132

III. PLATONISTS AND PURITANS 133

Introduction 133

John Everard 137

Platonists at Cambridge 154

New Philosophy 164

Peter Sterry 177

Summary and Conclusion 197

IV. PHILOSOPHUS TEUTONICUS 201

Lodowicke Muggleton 226

Summary and Conclusion 237

V. ANTINOMIANISM 240

Introduction 240

Conclusion 274

PART II

VI. JOSEPH SALMON 280

Joseph Salmon 282

Conclusion: Joseph Salmon 313

VII. JACOB BAUTHUMLEY 317

Bauthumley's Dualism 333

The Antinomian Theme in Bauthumley 342

Stoa and Conventicle 347

Summary and Conclusion 354

Appendix to Chapter VII 362

VIII. ABIEZER COPPE 366

Summary and Conclusion 399

IX. LAURENCE CLARKSON 402

Concluding Remarks 435

BIBLIOGRAPHY 444

APPENDIX 455

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Illustration Page

THE RANTERS RANTING--Title Page iii

BLOUDY NEWSE FROM THE NORTH--Title Page 15

THE RANTERS BIBLE--Title Page 20

THE JOVIALL CREW[1]--Title Page and Woodcut 27

THE ARRAIGNMENT AND TRYALL--Title Page 38

THE ROUTING OF THE RANTERS--Title Page 279

THE JOVIALL CREW[2]--Title Page 316

THE RANTERS DECLARATION--Title Page 365

THE RANTERS RELIGION--Title Page 401

A SINGLE EYE by L. Clarkson: Prefatory Poem 415

INTRODUCTION

The focal point of this group of case studies in seventeenth century English enthusiasm lies in an amorphous group of people known to their contemporaries as "Ranters." This term originally referred to exuberant preachers and is used in that sense in the sixteen forties but by the sixteen fifties the term is applied to raucus and rowdy fellows.[1] In particular, the word is used of folk whom we have characterized in this work as religious mis-fits and "drop-outs," people who belonged to none of the multitudinous yet recognizable sects but who congregated together to drink and to blaspheme, and some freely to engage in sexual license.

Our study of the Ranters themselves takes the form of four case studies of men who were well-known as Ranters. We have called them "arch-Ranters." Their names are Joseph Salmon, Jacob Bauthumley, Abiezer Coppe, and Laurence Clarkson or Claxton.

Salmon--from the evidence available--is the least colorful of this group. He manifests a quietist, immanental, disspirited religious strain probably derived directly from Familism. Still, at some time, tongues of fire sat upon him, and he was nonentitized and confounded into the Abyss of eternity. Of the four, he seems to have been closest to that enthusiastic tradition which finally resolved itself into the form of the Quakers.

---

[1] See The Oxford English Dictionary, s.v. "Ranter."

Bauthumley represents for us the speculator par excellence. He well illustrates what can happen when rigid ecclesiastical authority hardens into intellectual dishonesty. Then the authority of new discovery and new understandings is ignored, and no allowance is made for adjustment of outlooks upon the Cosmos when traditional ones have become untenable. Then there is left an emptiness in brain and heart, and speculation rushes to fill the vacuum that Nature abhors. The tongue is a small member, but, like a rudder, it can turn about the whole ship and lead it to shipwreck and ruin.

Abiezer Coppe is a vivid figure--a ranting and raving prophet who filled the thoroughfares of London with his crying in horror and dread. He was widely known. Crowned with Ivy, beside himself and spirit-stricken, he bore the thyrsus through the streets of London. Wine and Eros were his companions, and the dark Power of the Holy was about his head.

In Laurence Clarkson we see a disintegrating religious personality, and one which epitomizes most perfectly the popular picture of the prancing Ranter. But there we see the ravages of guilt, a man who knew himself condemned and lost.

Introversion, iconoclastic and barren speculation, divine madness, and pathogenic guilt--these are some of the simple elements epitomized in the arch-Ranters. But there is an interplay of these things, influenced by the complicated subtleties and violence of the seventeenth century revolution, which leads out into an irrational, degenerative, and destructive movement.

Salmon and Coppe show signs of a positive religious experience; Bauthumley is a religious neuter; but the experience of Laurence Clarkson is negative--an experience only of holy Wrath, of guilt and fear. In all of them we see exemplified the destructive power potential of the religious institution when it escapes from the control of firm prudence. Its essential constitutive elements--inwardness, a sense of creatureliness, the aspirations of the religious imagination, a sense of surrender, and the anguish of penitence, can become dangerous caricatures of themselves when allowed to escape from the quiet and firm hands of reason and common-sense. The subterranean forces which break out into religious forms are potent to pluck up and to break down, to destroy and to overthrow, as well as to build and to plant. In the case of the Ranters, these forces ran out into nihilism.

The immediate background to this remarkable outbreak of social misbehavior appears to be provided by Anabaptist antinomianism[1] perhaps imported into England by a group of enthusiasts called "Familists."[2] But other factors at work include that of the introversion typical of "inward religion," the shattering impact of the "New Philosophy" of the seventeenth century, and the widespread uncertainty and melancholia of that period. These themes are explored at length in the first part of this work.

Thus, we have attempted in this disquisition to explore the Ranter mind--to penetrate the thought and feeling of the Ranter--as well as to examine the theological implications of Ranter beliefs and disbeliefs. It is mainly with regard to this that we have presented and explored the beliefs and attitudes of persons other than Ranters, whose thinking provides us with a key to the understanding of the Ranter himself. But in addition to this, we have tried to make a contribution to the understanding of these other parties also.

The foundation study of the Ranters was made in 1949 by Russell Gilbert Scofield in his doctoral dissertation at Harvard entitled The Ranters in Seventeenth Century England, Their Principles and Practices. It must be called a "foundation study" because although others have written brief studies of this disparate group, none had attempted before Scofield to compile a comprehensive bibliography of primary material. To Dr. Scofield the present writer owes his initial bibliography and gratitude for the painful work which went into producing it. This present work runs parallel to that of Scofield in the sense that, whereas his is a study of social extremism and a consideration of the probable causes of it, we have attempted something of a psychological, philosophical, and theological analysis of Ranterism.

---

[1] See Norman Cohn, The Pursuit of the Millennium (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 2nd ed., 1961).

[2] See infra, Chapter II.

Another venture in this rich field was made in 1956 by Albert DeWitt Mott in a doctoral dissertation for the University of California entitled The Phenomenon of Ranterism in the Puritan Revolution: A Historical Study in the Religion of the Spirit 1640-1660. Dr. Mott has concentrated more in the historical field than in the theological and philosophical, and has seen the conflicts of thought, feeling, and sectarian development as resolving themselves in the Quaker movement. Like the present writer, and many others who have striven to interpret this period, he has stressed the importance of the prevailing "melancholy." Very surprisingly, he has made no mention of Scofield's prior work in the field of Ranterism.

Of other, shorter, accounts which have been given of Ranters the best are the following: Rufus Jones, Studies in Mystical Religion (London: Macmillan, 1909), pp. 467-481; C.E. Whiting, Studies in English Puritanism from the Restoration to the Revolution 1660-1688 (London: S.P.C.K., 1931), pp. 272-277; Norman Cohn, in an appendix to his Pursuit of the Millennium, already cited, pp. 321-378. The latter, also somewhat surprisingly, contains no reference to Scofield's prior work.

My thanks are due to the many persons who have helped me, in great ways and in small, but especially to Henry Cadbury whose interest and concern sustained me in the early days of my writing; to William Haller, whose magnificent book on the rise of Puritanism inspired me and whose conversation kindled the flame; and to Robert Handy of the Union Theological Seminary who patiently tended both the gestation and the delivery of the book.

PART I

I1

CHAPTER I

THE RANTERS RANTING

This is the merry meeting of
The Creatures set apart
To exercise their liberty,
And teach the Mothers Art.
   If Adam were deceived by Eve
   It was because he knew
   Not how to exercise the gifts
   Which nature did endue.
The slavish terrour that men have,
And thoughts of hell to fear,
Is unto us a laughing stock,
We give to it no ear.
   Some men another world do prize
   Of which they have no measure,
   Let us make merry, sing, and dance,
   There is no heaven to pleasure.
Which we enjoy with sweet content
A short life and a merry,
Is all the heaven we expect
Let's drink off our Canary.
   The fellow Creature which sits next
   Is more delight to me
   Then any that I else can find;
   For that she's alwaies free.
Yet whils't I speak of loving one,
Let no mistaking come;
For we that know our liberty,
In loving all love none.
   But for to satisfy our lust
   And beastly appetite,
   Not caring what we do or say
   So we may take delight.
Then let us rant it to the sill
And let our love too range,
For it hath wings and they are free'st
That in their loves do change.[1]

---

[1] Anon., *The Ranters Ranting* (London, 1650). Some Ranters were said to claim that since they were neither married nor given in marriage, they were as the Angels. Cp. *The Ranters Reasons* (London, 1651), p. 23.

12 This drinking song of the seventeenth century provides a good example of the humor which permeates much of the contemporary comment on those people popularly called "Ranters" even if it is not as bawdy as some, and even if it does not exhibit the salaciousness and prurience which marks a good many pieces of anti-Ranter literature. There can be no doubt that the Ranters inflamed the popular imagination since they called forth a stream of pamphlets, many of which were decorated with pornographic woodcuts on their title pages, sure to attract the attention of the apprentices as they wandered around the bookshops in St. Paul's Churchyard. Some pamphlets are purely the work of the good-humored imagination--sometimes slightly impure--crude, bawdy, of course, but not to be judged harshly. The humor of seventeenth-century England was perhaps less mealy-mouthed than that of our own day. Other pamphlets, however, are manifestations of the minds of "filthy dreamers," and set out to stimulate the interest of voyeurs, and of those who are fascinated by stories of sexual vice.

The rumors about the Ranter way of life were certainly startling. Ranters were reputed to regard themselves as god, and to be free of all the ordinary restraints of decent human society. Smoking and drunkenness were common to all of them, and they were reputed to practice adultery and fornication freely and in public, and buggery too, and to curse and swear in the most fulsome and blasphemous way without restraint; and all this in Puritan England! It was a cause of widespread fascination.

13 That Puritan England should have been the scene of this outbreak of immorality is not, of course, surprising. It is abundantly clear from the literature that Puritan attitudes toward life and toward its pleasures, had excited a marked reaction among the common people. Forbidden fruits are sweetest, or seem so, and people liked to eat them at least vicariously. We may assume from the fact that there was an unceasing stream of salacious literature from the press in the years 1650 and 1651, much of it dealing with Ranters, that the material enjoyed a wide sale. Much of it was the product of the muck-raking press, expressing horror and shock, while recounting the wildest stories in minute detail, livened here and there with a woodcut or a verse. Yet it is not without interest, for it does contain some traces of the truth and gives us those little facts that bring Ranters to life, and we shall give extracts from some of the saner pamphlets and tracts later on in the chapter. If it be thought that such material must supply only very flimsy evidence for the truth about Ranters and Ranterism one would agree if only the material were unsupported. However, we are not wholly dependent upon it. T. Edwards in his Gangraena[1] has something to say, as has Ephraim Pagitt in his Heresiography,[2] and the faithful Richard Baxter in his Reliquiae Baxterianae.[3]

---

[1] Edwards, Gangraena, 3rd edition (London, 1646), Sec. 2, Part I.

[2] E. Pagitt, Heresiography (London, 1661), pp. 259ff.

[3] R. Baxter, Reliquiae Baxterianae (1696), ed. by J.M. Lloyd Thomas (London: Dent, 1925).

14

A number of other writers also speak either soberly or beyond whose hysteria something solid can be felt. Here let us quote Baxter who says, after dealing with the Vanists and the Seekers,

> The third sect were the Ranters. They also made it their business, as the former, to set up the light of nature under the name of Christ in Man, and to dishonour and cry down the Church, the Scripture, the present ministry, and our worship and ordinances; and called men to hearken to Christ within them. But withal they conjoined a cursed doctrine of libertinism, which brought them to all abominable filthiness of life. They taught as the Familists, that God regardeth not the actions of the outward man, but of the heart, and that to the pure all things are pure (even things forbidden). And so, as allowed by God, they spake most hideous words of blasphemy; and many of them committed whoredom commonly, insomuch that a matron of great note for godliness and sobriety, being perverted by them, turned so shameless a whore that she was carted in the streets of London.[1]

A note of seriousness is struck here in contrast to the light-heartedness of some of the popular literature. This can come as no surprise to anyone who has read Baxter's autobiography. He does not seem to have been a man to whom laughter came readily. But, even so, we must recognize that here he saw no sort of reason to smile. He was deeply concerned about the spiritual well-being of his people. The mid-seventeenth century religious upheaval had broken up settled habits of thought, customs, and practices, and those who were morally and intellectually defective were left at the mercy of chance currents. "They reveal," says Rufus

---

[1] *Ibid.*, p. 73.

15 Jones, "the backwash of the spiritual movement, which in the main went steadily onward. They exhibit in their loose and unmoralized freedom the inherent dangers which attach to the proclamation of spiritual liberty, and they furnish a clear historical illustration of the truth that progress toward a religion grounded upon the inner life of man can only be slowly and painfully achieved."[1]

Jones goes on to declare that in the public mind "Ranters" designated tiny sects, seething with enthusiasm, and gathered about some "psychopathic, influential leader." It is true that the term "madman" is frequently thrown at Ranters, but in fact, as Baxter and others saw, the situation was more serious. In addition to believing and teaching doctrines novel and inconsistent with the faith once delivered to the saints, some Ranters had fallen prey to an ancient moral heresy of great attractiveness. They believed, as Samuel Butler wrote, that "A Saint that is strong in grace may boldly engage himself in those great sins and iniquities that would easily damn a weak brother, and yet come off never the worse. . . ."[2] In fact, they went even further, and perhaps not by that path. They believed themselves to experience that which is spoken of in the *Second Epistle of Peter*, namely, that they were partakers

---

[1] R. Jones, *Spiritual Reformers* (London, 1914), p. 320.

[2] Quoted by C.E. Whiting, *Studies in English Puritanism from the Restoration to the Revolution, 1660-1668* (London: S.P.C.K., 1931), p. 277.

16 of the divine nature; to them, nothing could be wrong. Small wonder that sane and moral Christians were concerned. It was bad enough that strange and novel doctrines should be introduced, but that Ranter conduct could in some way be justified by Scripture and Tradition was much worse.

In the course of this work we shall look more closely at the complex of ideas that made up Ranterism. For the present, it is time to set out and draw together some of the relevant information we have concerning them, first by surveying some of the wilder and more popular publications, and secondly by noting some comments of the more sober sort. Beyond this, in later chapters, we shall look particularly closely at the surviving Ranter writings so as to discover how Ranters saw themselves.

* * * * *

It would be an argument ex silentio that anti-Ranter literature does not begin before the 1650's. It is possible that lurking somewhere among the accumulated masses of seventeenth-century material in the great collections there exists some material that actually uses the term "Ranter" in the 1640's. But in the absence of such we yet have some evidence for the existence of some sort of ranting group as early as 1641. There exists an anonymous pamphlet of an amusing sort of that date called A Nest of Serpents Discovered or a Knot of Heretiques revived Called the ADAMITES.[1]

---

[1] No author, publisher, printer, or place of origin is given.

I7 It seems to be a humorous tract, a satirical "history." It tells of a sect whose chief peculiarity was nakedness. It was their custom to meet in a warm house where there was a fire! The story goes that a man could have any woman assigned him by the master of the house; that they abhorred marriage as unclean and sinful in itself because Adam knew not his wife till he had eaten forbidden fruit. When any man requested a woman the Leader would say, "Goe, increase, and multiply" (which later literature records as the Ranter watch-word used as a prelude to fornication). They received the Sacrament naked, called their congregation the "faithfull and true children of God," and all children begotten promiscuously they called "free-born." It is hard to see any sort of point to this pamphlet unless some-such Adamites actually existed.[1] The reference is reminiscent of stories of the Anabaptist followers of Melchior Hoffman in the Netherlands[2] a century earlier, and there may be a remote connection. The term "Adamite" recurs somewhat frequently later on in connection with the Ranters, as, for example, in the title of a after I/7

---

[1] Whiting, *op. cit*., p. 284, traces Adamites back as a sect to the twelfth century, and quotes Pagitt as speaking of them "as if they existed in England." He does not seem to know of our present pamphlet. N. Cohn, in *The Pursuit of the Millenium* (London: Oxford University Press, 1957), p. 190, places Adamites in the context of the "Brethren of the Free Spirit." In 1648, E. Elton in *Gods Holy Minde* (London) felt bound to write "Nakedness is a curse: therefore affected nakedness is monstrous and most vile." (p, 267) But he makes no explicit reference to Adamites.

[2] Cp. Jones, *op. cit*., p. 33.

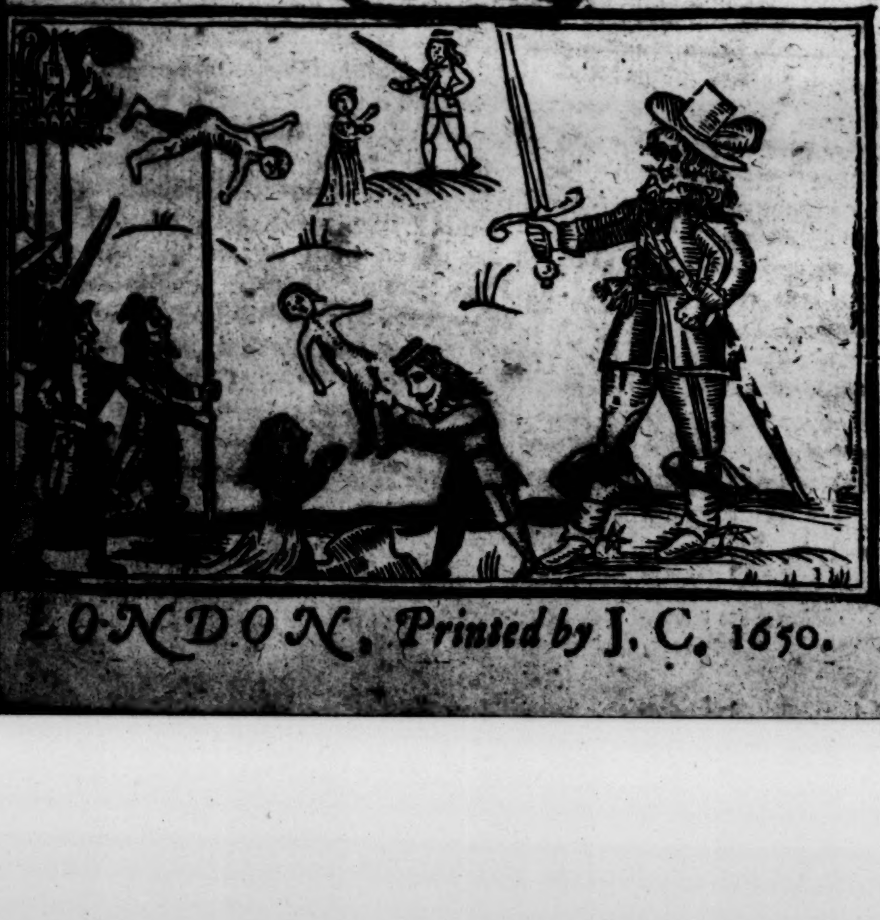
Bloudy Newſe from the North, Tilbury's

AND

he Ranting *Adamites* Declaration con-

cerning the King of *Scotland*, with their new League, Covenant, and Proteſtation; their denying the great God of Heaven, and burning his ſacred word and Bible; the name of a new God by them choſen, and his Speech and promiſe unto them; their new Law, and grand Court; their Arraignment and Tryal, and a Copy of the ſeveral Articles and Indictment; with the ſeveral ſentences to be inflicted upon divers offenders, together with their names. Alſo, a bloudy Plot diſcovered, concerning their Reſolution to murther all thoſe that will not turn *Ranters*; put in execution at *York*, to the aſtoniſhment and admiration of the Reader, that ſhall diligently peruſe this inſuing Subject, never before heard of.

Jan: 20 *Publiſhed according* [illegible] 1650



LONDON, Printed by J. C. 1650.

pamphlet of 1651 by S. Tilbury, Bloody News from the North, And the Ranting Adamites Declaration.[1] The curious sect of Adamites was only one among many strange groups. By 1641 the sectaries were already swarming in England, and drew from the pen of one John Taylor a pamphlet entitled A Swarme of Sectaries, And Schismatiques: Wherein is discovered the strange Preaching (or prating) of such as are by their trades, Coblers, Tinkers, Pedlers, Weavers, Sowgelders (sic), and Chymney Sweepers. He bursts forth into verse, concluding as follows:

> 'Tis past a Butchers . . . [obscured] . . . ewers reach,
> To perch into a Pulpit and to preach;
>
> A pot, a platter, dripping-pan or spit
> Are for a Ladies bed-chamber unfit:
>
> Rich Hangings, Curtaines, Carpets, Garments gay
> Do not become a Kitchin anyway.
>
> A Preachers work is not to gelde a Sow,
> Unseemly 'tis a Judge should milk a Cowe:
>
> A Cobler to a Pulpit should not mount,
> Nor can an Asse cast up a true account.

Poor doggerel though it may be, the verse gives us a clear idea of how men of all stations felt themselves moved by the Spirit to proclaim a Word,[2] and it is therefore the less

---

[1] The latter is a work of little consequence, bawdy and salacious, containing malicious and inventive exaggerations about the Ranters, and even accusing them of intending to murder anyone that denied their principles. The pamphlet has an interesting woodcut which may be seen elsewhere in this work.

[2] George Thomason was likewise impressed by this, and the comments "cooper," "tinker," "haberdasher," etc., are scrawled on a large number of the tracts he collected.

I
~~V~~9

surprising that the sects should have abounded in number and that they should have been as weird as they were.

Seven of the sects prevailing in 1650 receive some account in The Ranters Bible by one Gilbert Roulston who describes himself as a former Ranter. The full and lengthy title is worth quoting:

> Seven several Religions by them held and maintained with the full particulars of their strange sects and societies; their new places of meetings, both in City and Countrey; the manner of their life and conversation their blasphemous Opinion of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, and their burning of his blessed Word, and sacred Scriptures; the names of their new gods, and worshipping of the Sun, and three black clouds; with the manner of their idolizing them, North, West, East, and South; their drinking of healths to the Devill, and disposing of places in Hell; their blasphemous Creed and Litany; their savage opinion to ly with any man's wife either in houses, fields or streets, in the presence of hundreds of people; their Declaration in Kent; the apprehending of 30 of them neer Uxbridge, with their trials and examinations, and the routing and dispersing the rest of their fellow-Ranters near Lynn in Norfolk: a strange voice from heaven speaking to Mr. Roulston, a London-Ranter, upon his going from White-Chappel, to meet some of his fellow-Creatures at Hackney, and the great things that happened thereupon, to the admiration of the reader: the coming in of 700 since the second of this instant December, their Recantation, Oath, and Protestation. And Mr. Roulston's letter to his late fellow Ranters, with his Advice and Proposals, to be published in all Cities and Market Towns throughout England and Wales. Published by Mr. Roulston, a late Fellow Ranter.

Interestingly enough, not one of the sects described actually bears the name of "Ranter," and it must be inferred that the term was applicable to any strange sect of extreme behavior. Roulston, however, uses the expression "fellow-creature" to describe those whom he was to meet at Hackney and this was the expression used by the followers of Abiezer

I10 Coppe, the arch-Ranter, so it may be assumed that Roulston was in the main Ranter stream. He does not indicate in the pamphlet whether he had been particularly identified with any one of the traditions he describes. The term "Ranter," then, seems to be a general term, and a term of opprobrium.

Roulston's tract, which is now very rare, does not live up to its promises, but it is interesting enough to justify us in giving some account of it. It deals first with "Familists," a sect introduced, it says, by a German "forty years since," and that it first practiced in Holland. Its adherents are said to have combined fasting and public, naked copulation, holding it lawful to lie with any woman soever. They held all things in common, and "hold it Paradise to live so, because their Discipline allowes, to court naked, in which they blush no more then Adam at his first Creation (Genesis 2:5)." This German, says Roulston, thought it a great sin to cleave to either man or woman; that there was neither God nor Devil, Heaven nor Hell, and that they ought not to worship anything visible or invisible but the Sun, that after their "inhuman act of Ranting" they should turn themselves North, West, East, and South, "and that was a remission."

Next appear the "Shelomethites . . . who hold Swearing but a Complement, and blasphemy a badge of honour," acclaiming as most worthy he who could invent the chiefest oaths.

The "Clements," next, believed that they would be able to repent of their sins in the world to come, however lascivious now.

I11 "Athians" were mortalists who held that when the body dies, the soul dies likewise, and that both shall be received again at the day of judgment.

"Nicholaitans" were like the former but lived promiscuously like "the beasts."

"Marcions" were dualists of whose two gods one was the author of good, and the other of evil. They denied the Scriptures (while observing the traditions of men) and followed those norms "which the mad and ranting Ranters calls his Bible," i.e., "That Swearing, whoring, Roaring, Revelling, Blaspheming are the only actions of honour to bring them to happiness . . . drinking Healths to the Devill, and casting lots, for the disposing of places in Hell."

The next to be named are the "Seleutian Donatists" who burn the Bible. Neither the Word of God nor any under Heaven can make so perfect a Church as their own discipline--denying all powers and refusing to submit to any government. They opine that the "Mosse whereof God made the elements was co-eternal with him, and that Christ in his Ascension unclothed himself of the flesh of man, and left it in the Globe of the Sun . . . and that it is only lawful for them to idolize and adore the Sun, and the three black clouds, wherein its splendour is sundry times eclipsed and darkened,"[1] and they

---

[1] The pamphlet has an impressive astronomical sign on the title-page, and another inside. These may have been employed as astrological signs. One displays the sun, encircled by clouds, and stars, and with three dark overlapping circles passing across the bottom. It seems unlikely

MKJ I/11

The Ranters Bible.

OR,

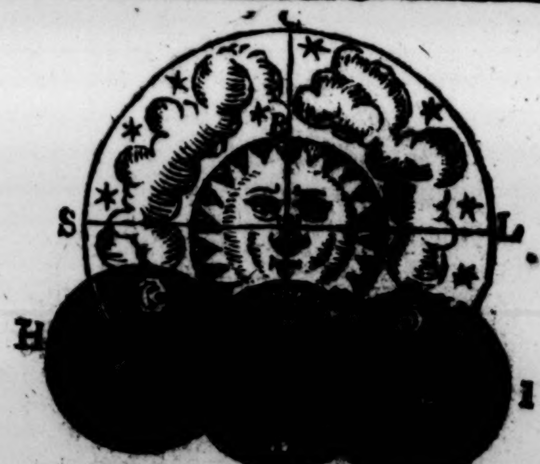
Seven ſeveral Religions by them held and maintained.

WITH

The full particulars of their ſtrange Sects and Societies; their new places of meetings, both in City and Countrey; the manner of their life and converſation; their blaſphemous Opinion of our Lord and Saviour Jeſus Chriſt, and their burning of the bleſſed WORD, *and ſacred Scriptures; the names of their new gods, and worſhipping of* [illegible] *and three black Clouds; with the manner of their idolizing them, North, weſt, Eaſt, and South; their drinking of healths to the Devill, and diſpoſing of places in Hell; their blaſphemous Creed and Letany; their Savage Opinion to ly with any mans wife, either in houſes, fields, or ſtreets, in the preſence of hundreds of people; their Declaration in* Kent; *the apprehending of 30 of them neer* Uxbridge, *with their trials and examinations, and the routing and diſperſing the reſt of their fellow ranters neer* Lin *in* Norfolk; *A ſtrange voice from heaven ſpeaking to one* Mr. Roulſton, *a* London-Ranter, *upon his going from White-Chappel, to meet ſome of his fellow-Creatures at Hackney, and the great things that happened thereupon, to the admiration of the Reader: the coming in of 700 ſince the ſecond of this inſtant December, their Recantation, Oath, and Proteſtation. And* Mr. Roulſton's *Letter to his late fellow-Ranters, with his Advice and Propoſals, to be publiſhed in all Cities, and Market-townes, throughout* England *and* Wales.

Publiſhed by Mr. *Gilbert Roulſton*, a late Fellow-RANTER.

Imprimatur, J. DOWNAME.



London, *Printed by* J. C. *and are to be ſold in* Cornhil, *near the* Exchange, *and at* Temple-Bar, 1650.

I12 believe that after death their bodies shall rest for ever. They "steer their ways and actions by the concourse of the stars; for toward Evening, so soon as the bright Comet, called the Shepheard Star appears, the said Star being the Word and the Sign given out by these infernal Creatures, for the calling in of their diabolical Flocks, they frequent their Babylonish meetings. . . ." The writer then rehearses the same tale of mass and public copulation.

The general tone of the pamphlet is highly credulous and slightly odd. The writer seens to have an interest in the stars. Certainly the familiar tones of ancient religious beliefs, and heresies, ring sonorously through the pages.

---

at this point that one will be able to point to any astrological significance though there may be one. L. Muggleton reports that Ranters and Astrologers consorted together (Acts of the Witnesses, p. 53). A very similar diagram appears in a small book by the astronomer Wm. Lilly, Annus Tenebrosus (1652) which diagram depicts the three major stages in the eclipse of the sun. It seems possible that the diagrams in the Ranters Bible may have been simply borrowed from some such book because the writer thought that they were fascinating.

A similar interest in stars is evinced in two other anti-Ranter pamphlets: (1) The Arraignment and Tryall (1650) which mentions the coming of a sect to England in 1349 (sic) which taught that the Resurrection was due to the motion of the planets; (2) The Ranters Religion (1650), "They (Ranters) say that a Resurrection is possible, and that there may be a restitution of our bodies, but then they say that the Starres and Plannets, by whose decay and continuance they measure the perpetuity and stability of all sublunary things to be the only causes of it, and so they run giddily into Plato's circumvolition of geares."

There is no corroborative evidence that there was a group of persons who "ranted" according to some astrological principle, but it is, of course, quite possible.

In any case, the diagrams may point to popular interest in the new Copernican science. The nova of 1604 thoroughly shook a world that had been already disturbed by that of 1572; and in 1610, when Galileo Galilei put his eye to his "optic tube," the ancient world had come to an end. Old certainty was replaced by an Abyss.

I13 Theodore Sippel remarks, "It is astonishing how many medieval heresies appear among the sects of the 16th and 17th centuries. In the Thomason Tracts much which otherwise flees the light of day comes to the surface."[1] This is true enough but one is aware of religious ideas more ancient than those of the Middle Ages, paralleling the scholarly interest in classical culture prevailing in this period. Ideas have a way of filtering through from one intellectual level to another, often becoming distorted or emptied in the process. The work of the religious pamphleteers abounds with references to Stoics and Epicureans, to Sabellians and Arians, and, as in this pamphlet, to Babylonish astrology. It seems that the advent of modern astronomy was also having its effect. As we must mention in a later chapter[2] this return to ancient religious ideas was not to be found only among the vulgar but also among learned and sensitive people.

If all these sects existed they were probably very small for there is no mention of them, save the Familists, elsewhere. Between them, they combine all the practices, real or alleged, of the Ranters at large. It may be that no one Ranter combined all of these peculiarities. And there are

---

[1] T. Sippell, Werdendes Quäkertum (Stuttgart, 1937), p. 95, n. 1. "Es ist erstaunlich wieviel mittelalterliche Häresien in den Sekten des 16 und 17 Jahrhunderts fortleben. In den Thomason Tracts kommt vieles an die Oberfläche, was sonst das Tageslicht scheut."

[2] See Chapter III.

I14 beliefs, such as pantheistic ones, which this pamphlet does not mention. Of the sects mentioned, the Clements are the most doubtful as belonging to the main stream since Ranters, in general, seem to have believed either as the Mortalists, or in reincarnation.

Some pamphlets were hardly serious at all, as is demonstrated by this bit of humor from The Ranters Recantation (1650). It tells of "Arthingworth, a notorious Ranter" who upon the conversion (to Ranterism) of 59 hearers "with fair pretence, went to the chamber door, and called for a Turk's head; in plain English, a pisse-pot, and in an instant, upon a great flash of fire, vanished, and never was seen more. . . ." Such a pamphlet as the one just mentioned may, in spite of its levity, contain important clues. The Ranters Recantation mentions on page six that, "Many of Ranting Everard's party are lunatick, and exceedingly distracted; they talk very high against the Parliament and this present Government; for which some of them have received the lash in Bridewel." This is a very sober comment based on hard fact and it is very curious that it should be combined with the preceding paragraph.

The Ranters Declaration (1650) by one T. Stubs bemoans, with suitable exaggeration, the fall of "thousands." It alleges that on December 9, 1650, "a great Company of the new Generation of Ranters" met near the White Lyon in Pelicat (Petticoat?) Lane where they disputed as to which sins were best . . . since the biggest sinner is the most

I15 acceptable in Heaven. We are told that each man took a woman on his knee when they began to drink and toasted, "Let us lie down and multiply." Then the "key" motif, popular in Anabaptist circles since a long time appears, for they believed, it is said, in two keys that God always keeps in his own hands, the key of the womb, whereby he lets us into the world; and the key of liberty, whereby he authorizes us to fulfil our own lusts and several appetites.

"This Diabolical Generation had on the ii of this instant December a meeting near the Horn Tavern in Fleet Street, where they began to delight themselves with a Christmas Gambel, which here follows in their infernal verbis. . . ." There follows a version of the so-called Ranters Christmas Carol which appears also in another tract, *The Arraignment and Tryall* (Anon., London, 1650).

They prate of God, believe it Fellow Creature,
There's no such bugbear, all was made by nature:
We know all came of nothing, and shall passe
Into the same condition once it was:
By nature's power, and that they grosly lie,
They say there's hope of immortality:
Let them but tell us what a soul is, then
We will adhere to these mad brain-sick men.

The Ranters are then accused of atheism, an accusation which this verse apparently quite justifies, and, in addition, of describing the sacred Scripture as mere lies and tales, which may prove to be something of a distortion when we come to look at the Ranter writings.

The "Classical" theme, earlier mentioned, reappears here also, for the writer compares Ranters with heathen who

I16 danced on May Day "in honor of their Devil, Goddess Flora, a notable rich Whore." And it is said that many Ranters wear a picture of Janus about their necks.

Here follows a passage verbatim from The Ranters Declaration so that the reader may get the sense of a typical passage of anti-Ranter literature:

> On the 9 of this instant December, a great company of the new Generation of Ranters, assembled together near the White Lyon in Pelicat-Lane, where they entred into a large dispute, concerning the exaltation of their jollities, affirming that the man who tipples deepest, swears the frequentest, commits adultery, incest, or buggers the oftenest, blasphemes the imprudentest, and perpetrates the most notorious crimes, with the highest hand, and rigidest resolution, is the dearest darling to be gloriously placed in the Tribunal Throne of Heaven, holding this detestable Opinion (Equalizing themselves with our blessed Redeemer) that it is lawful for them to drink healths to their Brother Christ, and that in the bonsing off of their liquor, each Brother ought to take his Fellow-Female upon his knee saying, Let us lie down and multiply, holding this lascivious action to be the chief motive of their salvation. . . .

The interesting wood-cut which decorates the title-page of this tract is to be seen elsewhere.[1] page.

There are many references to the Devil in the lighter publications. Suggestions of allegiance to him abound but do not seem to be made very seriously. In an age when witchcraft was taken very seriously it is interesting that it was still possible to joke about it. A very short skit called, The Joviall Crew or The Devill turn'd Ranter appeared in January, 1651, and a reproduction of the title page may be seen among the short collection of wood-cuts reproduced in

---

[1] See page 365.

I ~~V~~17 this work.[1] The piece is crude and rather silly but no doubt brought forth a good many hearty guffaws from the audience. Here are a few verses from it:

> No hell we dread when we are dead
> No Gorgon nor no Fury:
> And while we live, wee'l drink and--
> In spight of judge and jury.
>
> Come on my Boys, receive your joys,
> And take your fill of pleasure,
> Shoot for shoot, away let's doo't,
> But we must have our measure.
>
> All lie down, as in a swown,
> To have a pleasing vision.
> And then rise with bared thighs,
> Who'd fear such sweet incision?

With such bawdy glee were the Ranters sung about! No doubt the Ranters were the talk of the town.

In November of the same year appeared another anonymous tract called, The Routing of the Ranters[2] which describes an alleged meeting of Ranters in Moore Lane, at the sign of David and the Harp. When the Constable and other officers arrived the meeting is said to have broken up in confusion, and one of the participants dropped the following letter:

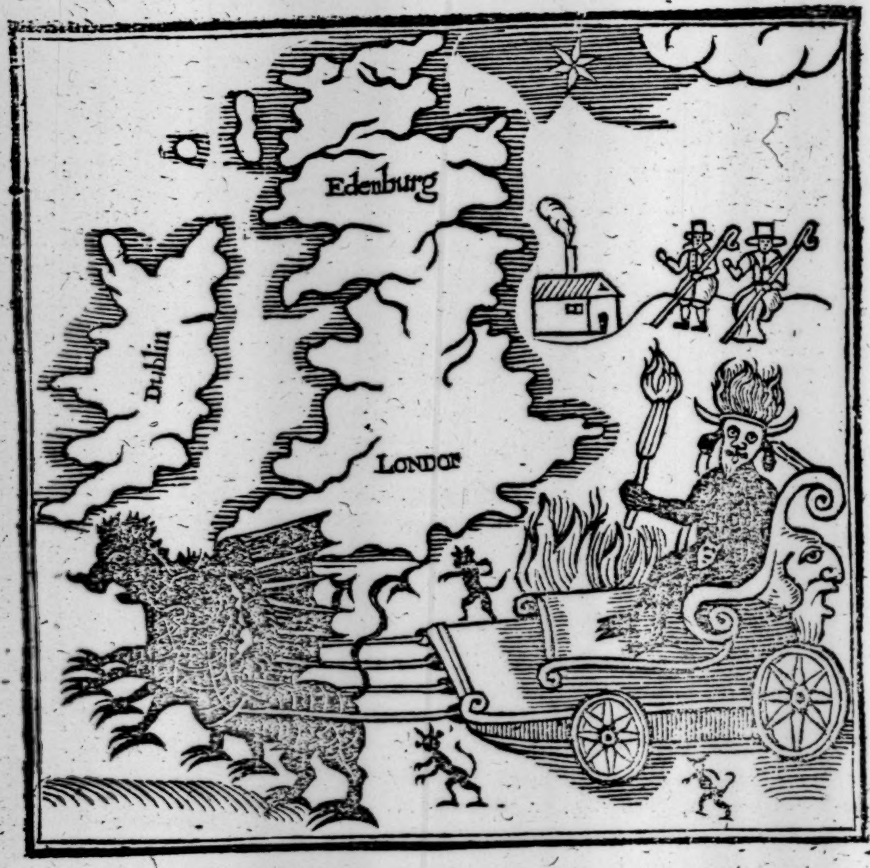
> Dear Sister and Fellow-Creature, whose sweetness we reverence, and whose Person we adore, whose witty Conceits we admire, and whose subtilty we wonder at, we do by this our hand-writing will and require you, our dearest fellow creature, that you personally appear at the place, where we last had some infernal conference, half an hour past four in the afternoon

---

[1] Facing page 27.

[2] The Routing of the Ranters (1650) may be so entitled as a reaction to J. Salmon's A Rout, a rout (1649).

Mker I/17



The Prologue.

Bedlam broke looſe? yes, *Hell* is open'd too:
Mad-men, & *Fiends*, & *Harpies* to your view
We do preſent: but who ſhall cure the *Tumor*?
All the world now is in the *Ranting Humor*.

THE
JOVIALL CREVV, 7
OR,
The Devill turn'd *RANTER*:

Being a Character of
The roaring Ranters *of theſe Times.*

Repreſented in a
COMEDIE,
CONTAINING

A true Diſcovery of the curſed Converſations, prodigious Pranks, monſtrous Meetings, private Performances, rude Revellings, garrulous Greetings, impious and incorrigible Deporements of a Sect (lately ſprung up amongſt us) called *Ranters*.

Their Names ſorted to their ſeverall Natures, and both lively preſented in Action.

Jan: 6

London: Printed for *W. Ley*. ~~1651~~. 1650

I18

> of this present day; for we have taken notice of the singular, great, and speciall services you have done for inlargement of libertie, since our last actings together, which we doubt not, will much inlarge our power, and preheminence (sic) in drawing disciples to us. Hereof you are commanded not to fail, for that Belzebub, Lucifer, Pluto, and above twenty more of the prime officers will attend to give you then and there new documents: and we shall promise, in the word of a King infernal, that you shall raign as a Princesse with us.
> Signed: Diabulo
> Dated at our new infernall
> Pallace without Bishopsgate,
> 10 of Oct., 1650.

There is a certain Hallowe'en charm about this scene and one can only wish that such had been the case in all dealings between the State and the alleged Devil's disciples.

It should perhaps be mentioned here that one of the leading Ranters, Laurence Clarkson, admits towards the close of his enthusiastic career to having been concerned at one point with wizardry,[1] but there is no indication that he was more than a charlatan out to get a few shillings for his purse. There is no evidence at all for any allegation of serious witchcraft among the Ranting ranks.

* * * * *

The seventeenth century presents its students with many surprises, and one of them is the extent to which very ordinary people grappled with the finer problems of theology and philosophy. Some of them were able to deal with such problems with clarity within the limits that they set for themselves. One such was a certain John Holland who declares

---

[1] Cp. L. Clarkson's The Lost Sheep Found (1660), p. 32.

I19 himself to be a porter. In 1651 he presented to the public a tract entitled The Smoke of the Bottomlesse Pit or A More True and fuller Discovery of the Doctrine of those men which call themselves RANTERS or The Mad Crew. This title contains a slight inaccuracy since it is reasonably certain that Ranters never called themselves by that name. However, the rest of the tract has every appearance of being calm, fair, and just. "I have done them no wrong," he asserts, "I have merely omitted to repeat their bloody swearing and cursing." And the tract is a short summary of the tenets of Ranter doctrine. Although he never makes reference to it by name, it is clear that he had read Jacob Bauthumley's The Light and Dark Side of God. The points which he makes will have to be discussed later on when we are in a better position to set them into their proper background. For the present, in order to proceed with our purpose of presenting the Ranters through the eyes of their contemporaries, we shall here set out John Holland's unpaginated account without major comment.

Ranters teach that a man ought to pray and seek no other God but what is in him. That God they call "the Being, the Fulnesse, the Great Motion, Reason, Immensity." One said, "he was not the God, but he was God, because God was in him and in every creature."

Christ, say the Ranters, was only a form, or a shadow, or a fleshly apparition of God. His sufferings were for himself and for himself alone; no other man could benefit from them. The ministry of Christ, of the Apostles, of the

I20 House of Aaron has ceased. Some say that Christ's work has been made over to us: "What Christ did in the flesh is now made over to us in the Spirit, and that we are no more to eye or mind Christ that died at Jerusalem, but we are to mind Christ in ourselves; others of them say that what Christ did was only a type of what every man should do." He records that some Ranters denigrated Christ and called him a bastard. They say, "there is as much of the God-head in every man as was in Christ."

Concerning the Spirit they taught that there was only one Spirit in the world and that there were no evil spirits. Such are the product of the imagination. They believed that they were taught by this one Spirit and that all other teachings either by Scripture or otherwise were of no use to them. It was of no use to hear sermons.

Of Scripture they said it was a "Tale, a History, and a dead Letter, and more, the fleshly History," a bundle of contradictions--the greatest curse that ever came into the world, the cause of all our misery; there would never be peace until all Bibles were burned. "I have the Spirit," says a Ranter, "why may not I write the Scripture as well as Paul?" John Holland heard Ranters describe marriage as "the fruit of the Curse." We are free from the curse and it is our liberty to make use of whom we please. Holland says that he meant to ask them how we were freed from the curse "but was prevented."

L.

121 All commandments are the fruits of the Curse, said some Ranters. Others of them said that all commandments were meant to bring men up to live in God, and God in them" which being done we are free from commandments," and "God's will is our will, and our will is God's will," and they say that God's will is his law, and that sometimes he commands men to kill, to steal, and to lie; and at other times he commands the contrary. "Hereon they infer that since we are living in God and God is us, why may not we do the like? For by his power these things are done."

Ordinances are for weak Christians, such as are under the teaching of the letter.

Sin has no existence. Sin and holiness are all one to God, he delights in both--Isaiah 42:16, 45:7.

With regard to man they aver that "man cannot either know God, or believe in God, or pray to God, but it is God in man that knoweth himself, beleeves in himself, and prayeth to himself--Gal.2:20."

The Devil is the left hand of God for all power is from him.

As for Heaven and Hell, they say that those who are free of law are in Heaven and Heaven in them but those men that cannot see and believe these things are in Hell, and Hell in them.

Holland reports that he saw a letter from one Ranter to another and that it said, "From Heaven and Hell, or from Detford (sic) in the first year of my reconciliation to my

122 selfe." It was addressed to "My pretty God and Devill; by Gods hart and wounds I love thee. . . ."

Death and resurrection are as rivers into the sea. Souls are reincarnated as either man or beast.

There is no such thing as a last judgment. It is a bugbear to keep men in awe. The world is not about to end. It was created many thousand millions of years before we read of, and shall continue many millions longer than we expect. (Writing in 1875, R. Barclay regards this surprisingly modern view of things as "curious" but does not say why.)

Although all major comments on Ranter thought must be reserved until we are in a better position to view it through Ranter writing directly, it may be as well here to make some brief remarks.

John Holland here presents us with a bundle of beliefs carefully retailed but reduced to no sort of order. Of course, there is no necessary connection between all of them, there is rather an assortment of elements. Notable among these elements is to be seen the influence of what Rufus Jones and Troeltsch called "spiritual religion," religion which has a gnostic character, concentrating on inward, esoteric understanding of the world and religious teachings, and possessing an understanding given by immediate spiritual experience. This approach is governed by a highly developed immanentalism which may, as possibly in this case, become a pantheism. It is a pattern which has appeared and reappeared in Christianity since the earliest times, from the Gnostics

123 to Amalric and the other disciples of Erigena, and to Anabaptists like David Joris. It creates a dualism of thought and of ethic between the spirit and the flesh, the kernel and the husk, the spirit and the letter. In due course we shall have to see how this form of religious insight and outlook appears within the Ranter writings. It might be as well to add, even at this stage, that the particular forms of Ranter belief, and one must speak of forms rather than of one single form, show the concurrence of other elements also, elements which we shall try to clarify in the following chapters, and they include Platonic immanentalism, panentheism, idealistic pantheism, materialistic pantheism, a codified dualism, and enthusiastic antinomianism.

However, after this slight preview, we must return to finish our general survey of anti-Ranter literature.

The intrusion of a rationalistic insight into the spiritual and enthusiastic scene (with respect to the age of the world) has already been noticed. In another pamphlet, The Ranters Religion (London, 1650), there appears another but this time in a theological direction and concerning the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation. Of the Virgin Mary it says, "If she descended of the seed of Adam . . . then the infection of originall sin must needs devolve into her, if she did not descend from Adam, then is she not the seed of Abraham, nor of the seed of David, nor by consequence of our Saviour, nor are the Genealogies of the Scriptures truely delivered." Adds the author, "O most horrid blasphemy!"

I24 Here follows a variation of the so-called Ranters' Christmas Carol which includes the following words:

> . . . God have a son? Why sure that son must needs
> Beget another (nature always breeds)
> His son a son, so a whole Generation
> Of Gods and Goddesses by procreation: . . .

One cannot help but feel that such detailed repetition of alleged Ranter teachings indicates a more than passing interest on the part of the reporter, and one is sometimes led to wonder whether the writer is not giving currency to them out of a horrified fascination not untouched by a little real, if unwilling, assent! The spirit of orderly inquiry and disorderly speculation which was so powerfully abroad in the seventeenth century was not altogether confined to the secluded studies of the scholars and certainly played its part, ironically, in the ravings of the Ranters.

There are several persons other than the arch-Ranters who appeared during our period, approximately 1640-1655, and who gained notoriety for their Ranting ways. Two of the best known were Thomas Tany (whose name had nine versions) and John Robins. Both of them later became associates of L. Muggleton. They were certainly called "Ranters" by their contemporaries because of their outrageous behavior but there is little in the way of serious doctrinal teaching to link them with the main Ranter figures and writers who loom so largely in this work. Tany is an incoherent pantheist whose writing is not worth considering. Further, there seems to be no connection between his writing and his conduct. A

125 short consideration of these two men and their ways will enrich the scene within which our major figures play their part and enlarge the connotation of the term "Ranter" which was used, as we shall come to see, very freely.

Thomas Tany was in the public eye from about 1649 to 1655, during the most intense period of Ranter extremism. He was a goldsmith in the Strand, London, within a stone's throw of the churches of St. Mary le Strand and St. Clement Dane's, just five minutes' walk from Charing Cross, the very heart of London. His occupation in one of London's most honorable trades took place under the sign of the "Three Golden Lions," and he seems to have originated in the parish of St. Mary Aldermary. From contemporary accounts one would guess him to have been epileptic. He had a marked stutter, and he was called "a mad Transylvanian" by one who had knowledge of him.[1] He claimed that on the 23rd November, 1649, he had had a revelation that he was "a Jew of the tribe of Reuben" and that he must change his name to Theaurau John. Muggleton knew him as John, and said that he circumcized himself.

He was certainly in cahoots with John Robins, for on April 25, 1650, he proclaimed a scheme similar to that of Robins', namely, that he was commissioned to return the Jews to the Holy Land. This could certainly be construed as

---

[1] *Mercurious Fumigosus*, No. 32, 3-10, January, 1655, p. 252. See also D.N.B. article, "Tany."

126 a sobering end but the strange ranting language of Tany gives the impression of mental derangement, especially when, not content with having announced himself "high priest," he proclaimed himself "Earl of Essex" and heir to the Throne.

In 1651 he began to publish pantheistic tracts which show that he had been reading Jacob Boehme who had suddenly become very fashionable among those inclined to esoteric religion. It was apparently because of these publications that he was befriended by John Pordage, the leader of the English Behmenists.[1] Tany was briefly imprisoned for blasphemy in 1651 but failed to benefit from this chastisement for, upon release, he went to Eltham and made a tent for every tribe of Israel. However, these exertions did not abate his quest for grandeur for, in 1654, he claimed the crown of France, no less. His desire for notoriety led him, subsequently, to create a violent scene at the portals of the Parliament, for which he was duly imprisoned again. His ravings came to a quiet conclusion in 1655, for he sailed away to Holland in a little boat to call forth the Jews there to their destiny, and vanished.[2]

---

[1] Pordage's name occurs several times in anti-Ranter pamphlets but without any special reference. He also befriended the arch-Ranter A. Coppe.

[2] DNB suggests that 1655, Muggleton's date, is wrong, and that Tany may not have drowned until 1668, but also does not indicate what he may have done with these thirteen years.

127 Such, briefly, is the pathetic, ranting history of Thomas Tany. His writings are both raving and picturesque by turns, and are the product of a man who had lost his wits. He might never have been heard of but for the ferment of the times, and the spate of cheap pamphlets that made mountains out of mole-hills. It might be added that inner London was a highly concentrated community in which it was not difficult to make a scene and attract an audience.

The same, in general, may be said of John Robins who, in 1650, while Tany was raising himself to the Peerage, was hied into the Old Bailey on a charge which is not specified by the testifying literature.[1] It could not have been very serious, however, for only six months later, in June, 1651, Robins and his adoring and hand-clapping followers were found in court again, to be examined by Mr. Justice Hulbert, and to proceed thence to Clerkenwell Gaol.[2] John Robins seems to be known at this point as either "the Shaker's God" or as "the Ranters' God." He was served by his own prophet, John Garment. It seems that Robins was never caught by the authorities in the act of claiming to be a god though his disciples certainly called him so:

---

[1] The Arraignment and Tryall with a Declaration of the Ranters (London, 1650); the title page with wood-cut is to be seen elsewhere in this work.

[2] H.G., The Declaration of the Ranters (London, 1651); John Taylor, Ranters of Both Sexes (London, 1655); Anon., The Ranters Creed (London, 1651).

Mew 7/27

3

The Arraignment and Tryall

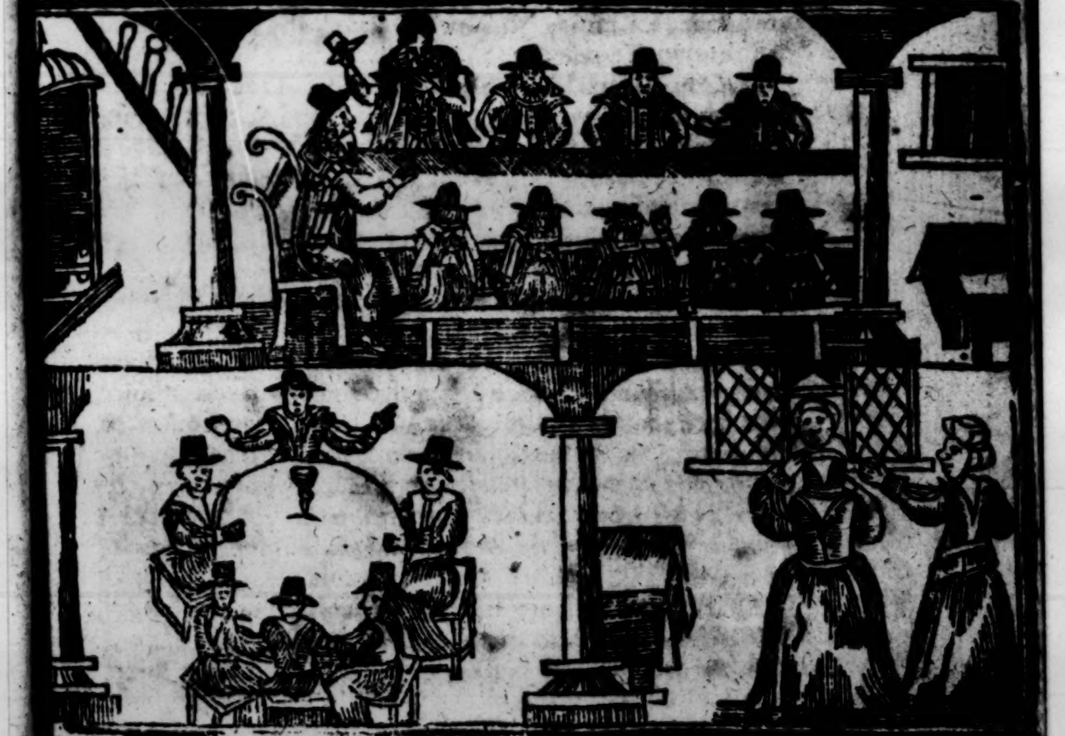
WITH A

DECLARATION of the RANTERS

R.

ALSO,

veral Sentences proceedings at the Seſſions in the *Old-Baily*, and Councel of War; thei protestations and the hanging of one up by the Thumbs; with divers Penalties to b inflicted upon others. The dancing and revelling of Dr. *Buckeridge* and his Wife, an other Gent. dancing all in white, in Berkſhire, and their Christmas Carol. A Disput between a Ranter in Bridewel, and one that came to ſee him; with his CREED an PATER NOSTER: and the Names of the falſe Gods they worſhip. As alſo, a List o many of the Ranters, from whence they are derived; and of many hundreds of them i England.



E. 17

Printed by *B. A.* and publiſhed according to order. 1650.

128 "The Examination of Margaret Hollis Spinster . . . Who being then likewise examined, confesseth and saith, That the aforesaid John Robins is her only Deliverer and God Almighty."[1]

". . . Elizabeth Penny . . . Who confesseth with uncivil gestures, clapping her hands, and otherwise, That the aforesaid John Robins is her almighty and eternal God, and that she expecteth to be delivered by none other."[2] And so on goes the testimony. But that of Joshua Garment is slightly more heady. He had a vision of the man John Robins "riding upon the wings of the winde, in great glory and majesty; The Word of the Lord came unto him in great power; This is thy Lord, Israels King, Judge, and Law-giver, He it is that must deliver the scattered Hebrews; proclaim his day; . . ." In addition, he is said to admit to believing (as the others) that John Robins' pregnant mistress (John Garment's Common Law wife) was "the mother of the Church, both of Jew and Gentiles, to bring forth that seed which was promised to Adam in the Garden; and the said John Robins is the same Adam that was in the Garden."[3] Robins himself is said to claim to be the third Adam.[4]

---

[1] Arraignment and Tryall, p. 2.

[2] Ibid., p. 3.

[3] Ibid., p. 4.

[4] There are signs of the fashionable Joachite threefold division of history everywhere in the religious literature of the period.

I29 The abnormal tension of feeling in the group is illustrated by the following:

"Robins caused a woman to fall to her knees, and she could not rise until he had commanded her. When asked whether he had a satanical art, and abominable witchcraft, he replied, "All Arts come of the Devil, but mine proceeds from the Holy Ghost."

After the examination, these followers of John Robins the "Almighty God," (one of them declared that Jesus Christ was the Mediator between herself and John Robins), prostrated themselves at his feet, "clasped him about the leggs, and cried out, 'Deliver us'!" whereupon he stamped on the floor and said, "Arise, and be hanged." whereupon they immediately arose and said, "Arise for ever."

The Justice's Committee noted that these people behaved themselves "very rudely and uncivilly clapping their hands, and fillipping with their fingers, casting themselves downe upon the ground, and singing, and using strange postures."

What a picture of enthusiasm! C.E. Whiting and Nils Thune[1] compare Robins with James Nayler at his messianic entry into Bristol, the New Jerusalem. It is an easy comparison to make but indicates no penetration of the respective

---

[1] Whiting, *op. cit.*, p. 275; Nils Thune, *The Behmenists and the Philadelphians* (Uppsala, 1948), p. 41. On the magical background to "prophetic acts," Cp. Andrew F. Key, "The Magical Background of Isaiah 6:9-13," *JBL*, LXXXVI, Part II (June, 1967), 198-204.

130 situations. Enthusiasm is not everywhere the same. However exaggerated, Nayler was acting out a role. For him, history was ripe, the Day of the Lord was come. Prophetic zeal was transferred into action. His personification savours of what anthropologists call sympathetic magic, and what others call wishful thinking. He was not really deranged with delusions of grandeur, like Robins. He did not claim to be God!

With reference to Tany and Robins, it seems safe to say that although both of them might be grouped under the loose terms "ranter" and "enthusiast" the only thing that they have in common is the extremity of their peculiarities. They were associates, it is true, in a crazy notion that they were called to be the Jews' salvation; probably one caught the idea from the other. Of the two Tany is the less sinister. He seems to have suffered from simple megalomania. But Robins was involved in some sort of cultic compulsion, and appears to have had the power of fascination or even of hypnotism. There was something of group religious hysteria in the association of the "Ranters God" and his devotees. The two men are not in the same category. Tany was mad but was Robins mad also? His subsequent history with the Muggletonians leads one to suspect that he was not, but that he was quite rational within the limits of the peculiar framework within which he operated. His delusions of grandeur might have concerned his power over people, a power that he came to associate with a doctrine of indwelling divinity.

131 It is possible that he represents a type of Ranterism branching off from that type exemplified in the teaching and example of Coppe and Clarkson, two arch-Ranters; it does not seem to be directly related to the Ranterism of Bauthumley and Salmon. But this we shall not be able to see until a good way further on when we have been able to consider all these leaders.

It is easy enough to dismiss all enthusiasm and all ranting as mere stages of religious madness. It may indeed be that. But to do so is to give up any chance of learning from the examples which history supplies to us something of the inner mechanisms of that history itself. After all, it may be that, for the most part, these persons were not mad at all but exemplify the result of the interweaving of powerful religious ideas which, taken alone, or within special well-controlled frameworks, ecclesiastical or civil, are noble and familiar, and result both in social and religious achievement. It is uncomfortable to think this but salutary. Extremism is always slightly shocking, but if there were no extremism the secular world could boast of no heroes, and the Church of no saints.[1] The borderline between sanity and insanity is notoriously difficult to draw, and it is inevitable that in the making of judgments about

---

[1] Neither Lytton Strachey nor Wm. James serve anyuseful end by their sneering at those who have been admired in their generation within a framework of value which Strachey and James cannot share. Strachey, Four Eminent Victorians, and James, Varieties of Religious Experience.

132 individuals one will be wrong sometimes, wrong, that is, with respect to the norms of one's own society. If there is any absolute standard it is not possible to express it (or know it?) within the relative frameworks of human understanding and social structure. We should, therefore, be openminded about extremism, be prepared to give it a serious examination, and to rule it out as an object of rational consideration only in cases which appear manifestly silly or which signally manifest symptoms of well-established mental diseases. It seems that such a distinction can be drawn between Tany and Robins, for example.

As it is easy to dismiss religious extremism as madness, so it is easy to dismiss the motivations of extremist religious leaders as mere lust for power, or prestige, or material gain, or the satisfaction of some other base appetite. Probably no man is entirely free from these things for we are, at least as many of us have thought, a fallen race. But a sound judgment about a man will take into consideration the preponderance of elements at work in him: he will be judged according as he is more selfish than unselfish, more self-indulgent than ascetic, etc.

Further, it is easy to attribute bad motives to a leader if his goals are not our own, or are such that we detest. We then do not want to see any good in him or in his ends. We do not want to understand. This feeling may be reinforced if he is driven by forces that we also know or guided by principles in which we also believe. This is as true in the

I33 realm of politics as it is in that of religion. Because of his extremism his goals, which fundamentally we know and understand, become unrecognizable because they are unacceptable.

The teachings of the arch-Ranters which we shall come in due time to consider will seem to us strange, outlandish, and perhaps very disagreeable, but, for all that, it is worth our while to consider that they may have been sincere in their beliefs. Even if we think that they were mistaken and misguided, we may at least enter sympathetically into their condition and know them as men.

It remains for us here to tell one more story, the story of the evil doings of one Thomas Webb, minister of Langley Buriall in Wiltshire. It is, in fact, rather wearisome and the account that we have rather revels in his misdeeds.[1] Webb is accused of a variety of things, adultery, homosexual practice, the teaching of Ranter principles, and the like. The story, as we find it recorded, it must be admitted is told rather better than most. The author seems to have been an educated man, and he professes a noble end in writing this account, namely, to expose the uncleanness and ungodliness of a false minister, to the warning of God's people.

Whatever be true of the conduct of the said unfortunate Webb, he was possessed of wit. He is reputed to have said, "There's no heaven but women, nor no hell save marriage," a

---

[1] Edw. Stokes, The Wiltshire Rant (London, 1652).

134 sentiment which cannot have endeared him to the women of his parish!

The principal interest of this story, however, does not lie in its account of Webb but in its reproduction of a letter said to have been found in his house. We cannot know for certain of its authenticity but its style and vocabulary lead one to treat it with respect. It is said to have been addressed to Webb by a To. Salmon at Coventry, April 3, 1650. It looks very much as if this should have been written "Jo. Salmon" who was one of the arch-Ranters. Information from other sources confirms the likelihood suggested here, that he was in prison at this date. Here is the letter:

> My own heart bloud, from whom I daily receive life and being, in whom my eternall freedom is perfected, to whom is ascribed now and for ever, Amen.
>
> Thou art the Webb of my own spinning, I have laboured to bring thee forth in this glorious form that thou now livest; let me cloak myself with the Webb of my own travel. My dear, thou art to me as a garment of Needlework, I wear thee as my choicest robes of Royalty; because thou art as a vesture upon me, winde nor weather affright me not; the Northren gales and Borean blasts of cruelty, I know cannot pierce through thee, my garment of salvation.
>
> Well, to be brief, I know, my heart, thou art not altogether uncertained of my present estate as appears by yours lately received. My love, thy patheticall lines, I did with much tenderness accept, and I shall never forget thy love therein manifested. Cop, my, thy own hart is gone to London; No other note from the Vulgar but hanging at least for him. The last week save one a Souldier was burnt through the tongue for a business of the same nature. The glory of these things possesseth multitudes both in City and Country, notwithstanding all their cruelty. For my own part I find my Genius much elevated and heightened, to look the worst of casualties in the face, that can succeed these things: My condition

> I35 outwardly is very poor, when lying here at great expences, yet am I made not to care for the future, although sometimes I scarce know overnight how I shall be provided for on the morrow. Well, what my Titular Angel, the Guardian Genius will do with this handfull of earth, I know not, neither am I at all troubled, but that if I live, my love to thee; if I die, I die to thee: So that whether living or dying I am thy,
>
> To. Salmon

A post-script follows:

> . . . Eternal plagues consume you all, rot sink and damn your bodies and souls into devouring fire, where none but those that walk uprightly can enter. Sirs I wish you damnable well, because I dearly love you; the Lord grant that we may know the worth of hell, that we may for ever scorn heaven: For my own part I am ascended far above all heavens, yet I fill all things, and laugh in my sleeve to think whats coming. Well, I say no more, but farwel.
>
> From my Pallace of Royal Majesty, in the last year of the reign of the Beast, and in the day wherein the neast (sic) of all hearts are ripening as fast as possible may be.

Edw. Stokes, the reporter of all this adds the following:

> But it hath been the usual practice of these vain persons to give the most cursed titles to each other, that ever the world practised, or the devil invented, as Toad, Toads-brood, Toads-spawn, Witch, Devils brood, and such like, with most horrible cursing each other, like mad Bedlams or Devills incarnate. See Salmon's letter before recited to Webb, and yet they love each other intirely. . . .

This seems to be authentic. Such an account would have been invented only to make accusations of witchcraft which, as far as we know, was in fact not done. We are thus left to ponder the significance of this strange language. Ranter cursing was a well-known phenomenon: the arch-Ranter A. Coppe was known to curse even in the pulpit or perhaps one should say especially in the pulpit. The document which we have

136 quoted is a marvellous example of this cultic cursing. If the style of Ranter language altogether seems strange to us, it seemed strange also to contemporaries. John Holland was told that it concealed a mystery. It certainly expresses, as it seems, a strange inversion of traditional religious values. No doubt that one of the elements here is the exercise of freedom by those who believed themselves free as no one else was free. They would insist on their freedom from sin by insistently performing so-called sinful acts. This was a well-established combination of Ranter principle and practice. But we are left to wonder whether this is the whole explanation.

If this report is authentic, and that Ranters did use devilish language, it is very interesting that they were never prosecuted for witchcraft. Perhaps they should have been!

This document is interesting in its entirety inasmuch as it provides us with a picture, exaggerated, no doubt, of Ranter influence at work in the peaceful English countryside. Of this, in general, we have little information. There are a few scattered references in George Fox's Journal[1] and in Richard Baxter's papers, and elsewhere. The letter shows us (if it be genuine) that some Ranters felt a personal tie to each other, even if there was no formal organization. In London the casual flocking together of birds of a feather

---

[1] See infra.

137 was easy and natural, but here we have an instance, possibly isolated, of a closely-knit relationship. Here we glimpse the man inside the Ranter.

Let it be said here that if Edw. Stoke's account of the proceedings at Langley Buriall and of the letter are substantially trustworthy then a new light is thrown on Joseph Salmon, if this letter be his. His main writings give no hint of depravity either in himself or in his friends. But then nowhere in his writings does he give an open and frank admission of the shortcomings concerning which he is so very penitent. It remains, therefore, possible.

* * * * *

One of the things that Ranters were accused by their contemporaries of doing was justifying their outlook on life by the Scriptures. They were adept at singling out texts that admitted of unusual interpretation, and it will throw some light on the Ranter psychology if we survey their favorite texts and look at their interpretations.[1]

The pamphlet The Ranters Reasons Resolved to Nothing (London, 1651) by Nat. Webbe and Wm. Grantham is a solemn rebuke administered to Ranter ingenuity. It faithfully

---

[1] Here we are largely indebted to The Ranters Reasons (London, 1651) by Nat. Webbe and Wm. Grantham. It may be seen at the Folger Shakespeare Library in Washington, D.C. This appears to be the only extant copy, and the only contemporaneous account of what texts the Ranters appropriated to their own usages, and it has seemed necessary, therefore, to give a full account of these.

138 gathers together texts which are found scattered through the Ranter writings and seeks to rescue them from Ranter hands as a knife from a madman.[1] The texts which the Ranters used are drawn indiscriminately from many books of the Bible simply as they found them useful, and there is therefore no special order in which they need to be considered.

It was a Ranter teaching that there's nothing good nor bad but thinking makes it so. Subjectivity indeed is the hall-mark of all their teaching. Thus the story in Genesis 3 serves for they "make the eating of the Tree of knowledge of good and evill, to be nothing but a looking upon some things for evill; as theft, fornication, adultery, swearing, cursing, blaspheming, and the like, and the beholding of the contrary virtues for good; as just dealing, chastity, fearing an Oath, blessing our enemies, and the like." It is evident, say our commentators, that the Ranters have eaten abundantly of the Tree for in their own eyes they had become as gods . . .!

Ranters argued, as we shall see in a later chapter, that God could not look upon sin because it was nothing. Scripture could be made to serve this point even, for Numbers 23:21 says, "He hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob, nor hath he seen perverseness in Israell."

---

[1] Ranters are here regarded as culpable madmen some of whom "have been struck with corporall madness and have ended their days in extream rage and fury," p. 3.

139 To prove that God dwells in darkness they cite I Kings 8:12, 2 Chron. 6:1: "Then said Solomon, the Lord hath said, I will dwell in the thick darkness."

To justify cursing they quoted Nehemiah's cursing of the violators of the Law--Nehemiah 13:25.

To prove that God works as well in darkness as in light, Psalm 139:12 served: "The darkness and the light are both alike unto thee."

And Isaiah 42:16 was not without its uses: "I will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight." And, in addition, Isaiah 45:7, "I form the light and create darkness, I make peace, and create evill, I the Lord do all these things."

Some of the teaching of the "Spiritual Reformers," especially Hans Denck, may have prepared the way for a supra-contextual interpretation of such texts.[1] And the whole Reformation movement with its insistence upon the sovereignty of God prepared the way for the application of the text following: "Who is he that saith, and it cometh to pass, when the Lord commandeth it not? Out of the mouth of the most High proceedeth not evil and good?" (Lament.3:37-38). And such a text is not incapable of a pantheistic interpretation given the right atmosphere and a conditioned attitude.

---

[1] Cp. Hans Denck, "Whether God is the Cause of Evil" in G.H. Williamson, Spiritual and Anabaptist Writers (London: SCM Press, 1957); Denck denies that God creates evil but allows that he "ordains" it, but for purposes of punishment.

140 "Shall there be evill in the city and the Lord hath not done it?" (Amos 3:6) is another apt example.

The removal of Biblical texts from their contexts and the subsequent allegorical or even merely free interpretation of them is nothing new in the history of Christianity, from the Rabbinical arguments of Jesus to the "inward" understandings of those of the "Left Wing of the Reformation." The Ranters were doing nothing novel. After their somewhat cavalier treatment of the Old Testament we should not be surprised at their saddling of the New with meanings also appropriate to their purposes.

A favorite text among the Ranters was Matthew 6:22 as lending itself very well to the Ranter doctrine of the subjectivity of evil: "The light of the body is the eye; if, therefore, thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light." In 1650 Laurence Clarkson (Claxton) the arch-Ranter published a notorious tract entitled *A Single Eye/All Light no Darkness; or Light and Darkness One*, a work which caused a scandal in Parliament, the teaching of which will be dealt with in its place.

The words of Jesus in John 19:11, "Thou couldest have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above," addressed to Pilate signified to the Ranters that evil power or the power to do evil came from God, or at least they gave that out as its meaning.

It might be thought that it were very difficult to find scriptural justification for the custom of the Ranter

I41 "My One Flesh" group[1] of having all women in common, but it was simple to adjust the story of early Christian communism to this end: Acts 2:44, "where it is said that all they which believed were together, and had all things in common: as if both our persons and estates should be liable to a common usurpation, and prostitution."

Naturally the Ranters did not miss a text so useful to pantheists as Acts 17:28, where it is said that, in God, we live and move and have our being. Our commentators imply that Ranters used this text also to make God the author of evil.

"Unto the pure all things are pure" (Titus 1:15) was peculiarly suited to "divine men" and could be supported by Romans 14:14, "I know and am perswaded by the Lord Jesus, that there is nothing unclean of itself but to him that esteemeth it unclean, to him it is unclean. . . whence," say our commentators, "You would conclude, that neither fornication, adultery, nor any other sin forbidden in the word of God, is unclean to any man, but to him who so esteemeth it."

Ranters seem to have been encouraged by the knowledge that God had chosen "the base things of the world, and things which are despised . . . to bring to nought the things that are. . . ." Then add our commentators severely,

---

[1] See on Abiezer Coppe and Laurence Clarkson, arch-Ranters, infra.

142 "which you would have men to read with your glosse or spectacles thus. That God hath chosen all manner of lewdenesse, uncleanesse, and villany to confound all sobriety, chastity, honesty, holinesse and vertue," (ref. to I Cor. 1:28). For Ranters knew that "It is the same God that worketh all in all" (I Cor.12:6).

Such, then, are the main proof texts which Ranters employed. As will appear when we come to look at the work of the arch-Ranters, they did not set much store by the word of Scripture unsupported by an inner illumination!

In due tribute to Messrs. Webbe and Grantham who compiled this collection it must be said that they performed their task with great seriousness, and,page by page, carefully rescue every text from the hand of the malpractor, restoring to each its proper meaning with due reference to the context. However, since it is fairly obvious that these texts were not being given their usual and conventional interpretation this writer will not weary his reader with a rehearsal of the restorative argument.

In addition to pointing out the Ranter doctrine of the subjectivity of evil there is another to which we must advert, and that is, as is quickly revealed by a survey of the texts which we have quoted, that Ranters wished to nullify culpability for evil words, thoughts, and deeds by insisting that God was as much the Author of evil as he was of good. Either one of these doctrines would serve to ease a burdened conscience, and it and they occupy an important

143 place in Ranter thought and teaching. We shall see this in due course.

As we proceed to draw to a close in our general survey of the reports and comments made on the Ranters by their contemporaries, we shall here present the full and fierce comments of Ephraim Pagitt[1] followed by the less polemical words of William Penn.[2]

> The Ranter is an unclean beast, much of the make with our Quaker, of the same puddle, and may keep peace with him; their infidelities, villanies, and debauchments, are the same, only the Ranter is more open, and less sowre, professes what he is, and as he has neither Religion, nor honesty, so he pretends to none. If he was a Christian, he has renounced his faith, nor can any desperate runagade to the Mahometans or Jews, more blasphemously abuse and prophane things sacred.
>
> He denies that there are either God, or Devil, Heaven, or Hell.
>
> Moses is a conjurer with him, and Christ a deceiver of the people; at the best, he makes a Doctrine and Practise of Jesus Christ and his Apostles, but dead works, dying and ended with them.
>
> That Preaching and Praying cease, that Preaching and lying are all one.
>
> God (saies one of them) has put an end to all Ministers, and Ministrations, God teaches his people now by inward unction. Baptism is with them only, Saint Iohns Ministry is a legall washing.
>
> The Scriptures are of no esteem with them, they are sleighted and cast off for Fables, which they cite not but in jest and to shew their . . . sets of blasphemies; their letters and discourses bring nothing else but a confused, senselesse, prophane Scripture medly, made up of impious flatteries, of impious kindnesse, and atheisticall curses, oaths, and ranting imprecations, in the same breath, or line. . . .

---

[1] Pagitt, op. cit., p. 259f.

[2] Wm. Penn, "Introduction" to Fox's Journal.

> 144 It is a maxim with them. There is nothing sin but what a man thinks to be so.
>
> In the Quaker strain, they are above Ordinances, hence it is nothing to be forbidden them, nothing can be unlawfull; nothing is more pretious and dear to them than community of men and women, which they call injoying the fellow-creature a duty one creature owes to another, and which (say they) is the true Christian liberty.
>
> They are the merriest of all devills, for extempore lascivious songs, not extempore prayer, but as absurd and non-sensicall, for healths, musick, downright bawdry, and dancing, the two last of which commonly proceed and follow the conjunction of the fellow creatures, which is not done in corners.
>
> I will conclude with this, they are contemners of authority, and as the Anabaptists (of which kind these and the Quakers are) deny all authority to Magistrates.

So Ephraim Pagitt. What he has to say does not bear the mark of direct contact with Ranters. He is heavily dependent upon pamphlets (such as The Wiltshire Rant), quoted by him but excised here to avoid repetition, which he probably bought at Giles Calvert's shop at St. Paul's. Calvert specialized in mystical, quasi-sectarian, and sectarian literature, as a glance at the title pages will show, and it must have been possible to keep a close eye on nearly everything published in this area merely by patronizing his shop. Pagitt's Heresiography seems to have been a best-seller, in fact, "a vulgar, catchpenny little book, made up, like Pindar's razors, to sell."[1] Still, it has its value for it reflects a contemporary viewpoint that Ranters were, in some way, rather like Quakers, and that both were

---

[1] A. Jessopp, The Coming of the Friars (New York: Putnam, 1892), p. 305.

145 in some way connected with the Anabaptist position. Of course, the term "Anabaptist" (like the term "Ranter") was used very loosely in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and served to designate almost any group that could be said to stem from the Reformation's "Left Wing," the "spiritual" movement. However, Pagitt was not very far out in his judgment as we shall see.

We are fortunate in finding a very interesting passage in Penn's "Introduction" to George Fox's Journal: In it he tells us what sort of people attained the name of "Ranter" and it is, without doubt, a most valuable piece of comment inasmuch as it points to Ranter origins.

> These people were called Seekers by some, and the Family of Love by others; because they sometimes met together, not formally to pray or preach, at appointed times or places, in their own wills . . .; but waited together in silence, and as anything rose in any one of their minds that they thought savoured of a divine spring, so they sometimes spoke. But so it was, that some of them not keeping in humility, and in the fear of God, after the abundance of revelation, were exalted above measure; and for want of staying their minds in an humble dependence upon Him that opened their understandings to see great things in His law, they ran out in their own imaginations, and mixing them with those divine openings, brought forth a monstrous birth, to the scandal of those that feared God. . . . This people obtained the name of "Ranters."

* * * * *

It is now time to summarize a few points and to add some concluding observations.

It seems that the literature written against the Ranters, and using that name, begins in 1650, but it is almost certain that the people designated by this term are the objects of

146 literary attack in the early 1640's. It is primarily the concern of this study to focus attention on the Ranters as some sort of distinguishable entity as they appear by that name during the English Commonwealth, and therefore no attempt has been made to discover the extent of literary material directed against any possible precursors. It is hoped that the material which we have used will have proved sufficient to delineate the principal characteristics of this group, and to point towards those elements which together, and given a certain environment and particular personality types, went to make up Ranterism. Naturally these pages present only a selection of the material available, but, hopefully, this is of such a kind as to give the reader a "feel" of its nature.

Ranters of some sort were in the public eye before 1650. In 1648 Parliament was driven by the rumor of them to pass an Act against blasphemy, which provided for such very severe penalties as to make it unenforceable.[1] Subsequently, the last day of February 1649 brought a Parliamentary proclamation of "A Solemn Day of Humiliation, Fasting, and Prayer" because "such crying sins, hideous blasphemies, and unheard of abominations (and that by some under pretence of Liberty, and greater measure of Light) as after all our wondrous Deliverances do manifest themselves to the

---

[1] W.K. Jordan, Development of Religious Toleration in England (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1938), pp. 112ff and 133.

147 exceeding dishonour of God, and reproach to our Christian Profession."

It seems that official attention was attracted to Ranter writings only in 1648-1649. Ranter leaders were publishing as early as 1646[1] but there is no indication of official reaction to this group of people before the 1648 "Blasphemy Bill." The Proclamation mentioned above followed hard upon the condemnation to burning of the Fiery Flying Roll of A. Coppe (February 1, 1649), and Parliament, now roused, shortly did likewise for the anarchistic A Rout, A Rout of Joseph Salmon. Yet, Clarkson's shocking book, A Single Eye of October 4, 1650, which appears to have been directly precipitated by two more Parliamentary Acts, those of 10 May and 9 August, 1650, shows how ineffective legislation was! A summary of these Acts follows:

> An Act for suppressing the detestable sins of Incest, Adultery and Fornication (10 May, 1650).
>
> For the suppressing of the abominable and crying sins of Incest, Adultery, and Fornication, wherewith the Land is much defiled and Almighty God highly displeased; Be it Enacted by the Authority of this present Parliament, That. . . .

The penalty for incest was "death as in case of Felony, without benefit of Clergy, and disablement of any offspring." For adultery "as well the man as the woman offending therein, and confessing the same, or convicted by verdict . . . shall suffer death. . . ."

---

[1] L. Clarkson, Truth Released (1646).

148 For fornication, three months' gaol without the option of a fine was fixed for both parties.

Anyone keeping a Bawdy House or being a common Bawd "shall for his or her first offence be openly whipped and set in the Pillory, and there marked with a hot Iron in the forehead with the letter B. . . ." And for these last two offences the penalty for a subsequent conviction should be death.

The "Act against several Atheistical, Blasphemous and Execrable Opinions, derogatory to the Honour of God, and destructive to Human Society (9 August, 1650)" reflects Parliament's "great grief and astonishment" that, previous action notwithstanding, divers men and women had lately discovered themselves to be most monstrous in their opinions and loose in all wicked and abominable practices, rejecting the use of any Gospel Ordinances, and denying the necessity of civil and moral righteousness among men. The Act is directed especially against any who profess themselves or others "to be very God, or to be the Infinite or Almighty or equal with the true God," or who say that the true God "dwells in the Creature *and no where else*."[1] Here one may note the appearance of a fully developed materialistic pantheism.

The Act continues by directing its attack against the specific Ranter doctrines that made God the author of evil, or that made the notion of evil entirely subjective and which denied that anything could be evil in itself, or who

---

[1] My italics.

149 went further even, and insisted that "the acts of Adultery, Drunkenness, Swearing and the like open wickedness, are in their own nature as Holy and Righteous as the Duties of Prayer. . . . That there is neither Salvation or Damnation, or that these are one and the same thing, and that there is not any distinction or difference truly between them."

Surprisingly, the sentence was six months' gaol and banishment only, which reflected the view of the Act that offenders were "turning into licentiousness" the liberty of conscience promised in the Declaration of 27 September, 1649. Still, its leniency made this Act somewhat incompatible with the one that had gone before.

The Acts may have been, in part, the product of the hysterical pamphleteering which has been illustrated in this chapter, but certainly, they served to crown the hubbub with sensation, and doubtless gave certain authority to the wildest tales.

What was the truth of these tales? Were the Ranters truly the raving, naked immoralists of which one reads? What sort of fire lay beneath the smoke? If one is to be guided by the restrained words of William Penn[1] on the one

---

[1] Penn's "Introduction" to Fox's *Journal*, before quoted. "Barclay in his *Anarchy of the Ranters* (1676) associates them with the more moderate of the Münster Anabaptist Party in England": R. Barclay, *Inner Life of the Religious Societies of the Commonwealth* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1876), p. 416.

I50 hand, and by the admissions of A. Coppe[1] and L. Clarkson on the other, one must conclude that Ranters were not all the same; with respect to belief this has been already illustrated by the seven sorts of religion listed in *The Ranters Religion*. But it seems likely that among Ranters there were differences, not only of doctrine, but also of conduct. As we shall see when we come in due course to review the work of the arch-Ranters, there were marked differences of temper among them.

That groups of Ranters met in taverns is sure. Muggleton tells us[2] that one of them kept a victualling house and sold drink in the Minories, London, and that the Ranters "would spend their money there." And it was there that Muggleton encountered "several Ranters and Astrologers, and had conversation with them."

That Ranters made a practice of meeting in ale-houses gives an indication of the type of people that some of them were. Muggleton says that at the Minories two Ranters tried to get another one of them to curse him and his God, and they were "three of the most desperatest atheistical Ranters that had ever been in our Company as yet."

Ranters seem to have had a variety of meeting places. Apart from the Minories they were known to meet near

---

[1] See on Abiezer Coppe, arch-Ranter, *infra*.

[2] *Acts of the Witnesses*, pp. 52-53.

151 Tyburn[1] (the present Marble Arch in London), in Petticoat Lane at the White Lyon,[2] in a tavern in or near Shoemakers Alley,[3] in Whitechapel nearby,[4] and in Soho at Westminster.[5]

Outside of London, Ranters were widely dispersed, wherever Anabaptism had existed, according to Baxter.[6] They were in the North, in Lancashire, Yorkshire; in the Midlands, Warwick and Leicester; in East Anglia, Norfolk and Suffolk; in the South, Sussex, Hampshire, and Wiltshire; in the West, Bristol, Dorset, and probably elsewhere; but it seems that the Midlands held the greatest concentration.[7] There was in July, 1654, a great meeting at Swannington in Leicestershire of divers sorts of religious folk to which many Baptists and Ranters came.[8] George Fox encountered them there as he did on a number of occasions, on the fringe of Friends' Meetings, among that assortment of people to whom he addressed the Word of Life. His Journal last records

---

[1] Ranters Declaration (1650), p. 4.

[2] Ibid., p. 2.

[3] Routing of the Ranters (1650).

[4] Ibid.; Ranters Recantation (1650), p. 1.

[5] Ranters Bible (1650), p. 1.

[6] G.F. Nuttall, Richard Baxter (London: Thomas Nelson, 1965), p.37. The references in Fox's Journal point the same way.

[7] G.F. Nuttall, Studies in Christian Enthusiasm (1948), p. 80.

[8] Fox's Journal (Penney, 1911), Vol. I, p. 151. Cf. R. Farnsworth's letter to Jacob Bauthumley, mentioned in our Chapter vii.

152 meeting them in England in 1668[1] and Pagitt mentions them as existing in 1661. Gildon says that they were still creating trouble in the reign of Queen Anne.

> They despised the ordinances and duties of religion. They said that Moses, Christ, and Mohammed were all imposters, and they spoke of the Bible ironically as the "divine legacy." They still practised a community of women, and drank, danced, and sang obscene songs at their meetings. They disowned the authority of magistrates, and to them Christian liberty was nothing but liberty to sin.[2]

Both Whiting and Barbour[3] refer to Ranters as a sect, yet there is no evidence of organization, no creed, no ministry (only leadership), no established meeting houses, and no order of religious service. We know already that the term "Ranter" could designate persons of various beliefs, and presumably, of varying conduct. However, there were certainly several Ranter groups, attaching themselves to a number of different leaders who shared the same general type of belief, and who expressed themselves publicly in a raving and enthusiastic manner, a manner shared also, it must be added, by members of Quaker groups. (But cursing seems to have been peculiar to Ranter groups). The accidental survival of only certain tracts and pamphlets gives us an insight into only particular Ranter groups, and we cannot

---

[1] Journal, Vol. II, p. 125; But in America in 1672; see Vol. II, p. 222.

[2] Whiting, op. cit., p.272; Cf. Barbour, The Quakers in Puritan England (Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1963), p. 101.

[3] Ibid.

153 thereby be certain that we have a complete picture. Yet we may be rather sure that there existed an inner constellation of groups which recognized each other as of a kind. Perhaps the word "cult" will serve us where the word "sect" will not. Raving and cursing, common to all Ranter groups, seems to have become an esoteric Ranter language. They shared some characteristics with the Seekers including the disavowing of all traditional forms of highly organized religion,[1] and appeared where Baptists, Seekers, Familists, and Quakers met together. Their principal belief seems to have been some type of extreme immanentalism, or pantheism, coupled with the belief that they were "godded," the major doctrine of the Familists. But unlike Familists and Baptists, they had no sense of mission. They were glad to be heard but they had no purpose to convert the world, neither were they millenarians.

Their sense of divinity, among other factors, led some of them to an extreme antinomianism, and to libertinism. George Fox does not accuse them of sexual license and neither does William Penn, so that it does not seem to have been a general characteristic. In fact, this may be true of only one Ranter group, the "My One Flesh" of Abiezer Coppe. The Act of 10 May, 1650 may have been exaggerated in tone but

---

[1] R. Jones, Studies in Mystical Religion (London: Macmillan, 1923), p. 467, speaks of ". . . the dregs of the Seeker movement--the Ranters."

154

not entirely misdirected. Here we may with approval quote Masson:[1]

> There were probably varieties of Ranters theologically. Pantheism, or the identification of God with the universe, and His indwellings in every creature, angelic, human, brute, or inorganic, seems to have been the belief of most Ranters that could manage to rise to a metaphysics . . . the only question is whether there were any tenets mixed up with Ranterism, or held by some roughly called Ranters, that were capable of being dissociated, and that were in fact in some cases dissociated, from offences against public decency.

Masson's judicious comments convey his impression that a genuine theological position may have been concealed behind the phenomena of Ranter language and behavior, and of which sexual promiscuity and blasphemy were perversions. In dealing with Ranters we are not all the time dealing with preachers and writers but with ordinary folk, unprotected by education and the powers of rational thought, caught up in the social chaos of their day, in the chaos, also, of the most extreme and picayune religious speculation. Platonism and pantheism were found in high places, and the influence of radical, speculative thinkers from the previous century, Denck, Schwenckfelder, Joris, and H. Niclaes, was being subtly but keenly felt both in university and conventicle. The powers of orthodoxy had been shaken. In such circumstances an ill-comprehended doctrine may become a slogan, and a movement like antinomianism pass into licence.

---

[1] Masson, Life of Milton, Vol. V, p. 18.

155 Ecstasy, too, became commonplace where enthusiasm abounded: to be "beside oneself" and to fall into "divine madness" is not without risk even in the case of one like Socrates, and our ranting ruffians were, for the most part, butchers, and bakers, and candlestick-makers. The tales of the Ranters' ecstatic extravaganzas should not, in fact, condemn these folk in our eyes. Such enthusiasm or "spirit-possession" is not inseparable from sensitivity to moral values or even from spiritual refinement. Early Quaker Meetings were noisy and ecstatic also, and the Meetings were loath to quench the spirit. But there is, of course, a difference, at least of result, between ecstasy within a strong moral framework and ecstasy within an entirely subjectivistic outlook where there are no stars to guide. And this is a difference between Ranting and Quaking.

It might easily be felt that alcoholic intoxication facilitated spiritual intoxication--not a new phenomenon in religious history--and it and smoking may have played a part somewhat similar to that occupied by marijuana in the mid-twentieth century. Of course, tobacco was not hallucinating, but it was given a shining aura by being forbidden by the respectable! In fact, the whole Ranter complexion is highly suggestive of those groups which exist on the fringe of respectable secular and religious society commonly known in our present period as "Hippies." This cultus, of dubious morality, has at points penetrated even into university

156 society on the strength of its "spiritual" character. Yet there is hardly any indication that Ranterism, of any sort, penetrated into sophisticated society in the seventeenth century[1] unless one consider the English Behmenists in this category: (the reader will recall that Dr. Pordage, the Behmenist leader, befriended two of the arch-Ranters and may have been involved with at least one aspect of Ranterism, as we shall see later). We should not perhaps be too ready to throw stones at an earlier generation.

Somewhere in such an extravagant religious phenomenon as Ranterism where feeling dominated reason, it cannot be surprising that the urgent and insistent drives of sex should have found enthusiastic expression.[2] After all, eroticism, and mysticism, eroticism and religion, have a long history of association. It may be that the springs of passion, whether of physical or spiritual emotion, draw from the same profound subterranean source; and passion, of any sort, if it is to nourish the fruits of the spirit, must be disciplined and directed. But this is not easy to accomplish in any generation. How thin is the skin of civilization! How

---

[1] North, *Life of Sir Francis North*. "Lord Chief Justice Scraggs was accused of having been a Ranter." See Whiting, *op. cit*., p. 276. Was this perhaps an isolated phenomenon?

[2] E. Troeltsch, *Social Teachings* (Olive Wyon, 1931), Vol. II, p. 731. "Above all, eroticism here plays a leading part, since either the sexual stimulation is used to stimulate religious enthusiasm, or the latter strengthens and expresses itself in sexual stimulation."

157 near the surface lies the brute! How quickly the restraints of reason evaporate upon the aggressive impulse or the pang of lust!

Further, moral order is largely dependent upon social order: when the latter moves the former totters. The brutal social and religious quakes of the seventeenth century that shook the monarch from his throne and the bishop from his chair undermined the structure of social and moral order. That it became conceivable to decapitate the King for his principles, and the Archbishop for his conscience, is a mark of the extreme convulsions that agitated and agonized the public conscience and the principles of public life. Moral judgments are notoriously ephemeral. In the way in which they are sought so they manifest themselves. What is impossible one day becomes the approved object of desire another day. It is no wonder if, when the central pillars of authority were publicly assaulted and demolished, the tremors of the onslaught should resonate through all levels of life, public and private, corporate and individual, and that the ordinary restraints on the powerful drives that animate men and the religious personality should be slackened. We cannot be amazed that Dionysos should establish his rights. Used, as we are, to the cold and elegant portals of German and Anglo-Saxon religion, to the restrained Bidding Prayer and chanted Psalm, we are easily shocked by what is primitive and unadorned. The dancing of naked David before the Ark is no more acceptable to us than the rituals of Diana or the rites of Priapus.

158

> O base! saith mincing Mical, the least spark of modesty would be as red as crimson or scarlet to hear this.

The arch-Ranter Coppe hurls the name "Mical" in our teeth.

Whiting, shocked by what he contemplated in his study, must have forgotten the brute stuff of which religion is made when he wrote:

> If only half the things told of the Ranters are true, they must have exhibited an extraordinary phenomenon of religious degeneration. At their worst their gatherings must have been disgraceful orgies, at their best they were meetings where the so-called worshippers smoked and shouted. Doctrinally, their contemporaries saw in their teachings a revival of ancient Gnosticism.[1]

Of course, one would have to admit that the conduct of Coppe and his associates was neurotic, even perverse, having regard to the place and age in which they lived. It was rather a short outburst quickly reabsorbed into a society that accepted its history, and the discipline demanded by the future. It is the writer's hope that in the pages that lie ahead we shall come to understand these men, and the forces playing on them, then, when all is understood, all will be forgiven.

---

[1] Whiting, op. cit., p. 276.

159

A Short Title List of Primary Sources of Anti-Ranter Literature which have informed Chapter I but have not necessarily been quoted

Anon. *A Nest of Serpents* (1641).

______. *The Arraignment and Tryall* (1650).

______. *The Ranters Recantation* (1650).

______. *The Ranters Religion* (1650).

______. *The Routing of the Ranters* (1650).

______. *The Ranters Ranting* (1650).

______. *The Joviall Crew* (1650).

______. *The Ranters Creed* (1651).

______. *Strange News from the Old Bayly* (1651).

______. *Cloathing for the Naked Woman* (1652).

______. *The Ranting Whore's Resolution* (1662).

Barclay, R. *The Anarchy of the Ranters* (1676).

Brown, D. *The Naked Woman* (1652).

Chandler, J. *A Seasonable Word to all those called Ranters* (1659).

Collins, I. *Strange News from Newgate* (1651).

Edwards, T. *Gangraena* (1646).

Farnsworth, R. *The Ranters Principles* (1655).

______. "Letter to J.B." (July, 1654).

Fisher, Samuel, *Baby-Baptism meer Babism* (1653).

Hickock, R. *A Testimony against the people called Ranters* (1659).

160 Holland, John. *The Smoke of the Bottomles Pit* (1651).

H., G. *The Declaration of John Robins* (1651).

Moon, R. *A Looking-glasse for Ranters* (1653).

Paggitt, E. *Heresiography* (1661).

Roulston, G. *The Ranters Bible* (1650).

Rutherford, S. *A Survey of the Spiritual Antichrist* (1648).

Sheppard, S. *The Joviall Crew*; *The Devill turned Ranter* (1651).

Stokes, E. *The Wiltshire Rant* (1652).

Stubs, T. *The Ranters Declaration* (1650).

Taylor, J. *Religions Enemies* (1641).

_______. *Ranters of Both Sexes* (1651).

_______. *A Swarm of Sectaries* (1641).

Tickell, John. *Animadversions of Mr. Coppe's Sermon* (1651).

_______. *The Bottomlesse Pit Smoaking in Familism* (1651).

Tilbury, S. *The Ranting Adamites Declaration* (1650).

_______. *Bloody News from the North* (1651).

Webbe, Nat. *The Ranters Reasons* (1651).

Welde, T. *The Rise, Reign, and Ruine of the Antinomians, Familists and Libertines* (1644).

II1

CHAPTER II

THE FAMILISTS OF LOVE

Introduction

In this chapter we have attempted to gain a picture of the type of inward religion imported into England by the Familists. In order to give perspective to this picture, and also to prepare the ground for discussions in later chapters, we have discussed the possible antecedents of Familism in the form of an inquiry into the connection between the Anabaptist, David Joris, and the Familist Patriarch, Henry Nicholas (H.N.). In doing so, we have laid out the main lines of difference between the two major types of enthusiastic spirituality, namely, "pneumatic enthusiasm" and "inward religion," and between them and pantheism. These three strands of religion, each manifested in the arch-Ranters, are each colored by a different religious attitude. Pneumatic enthusiasm is dynamic; immanentalistic enthusiasm or "inward religion" is yielded or quiet; pantheism is quietist or passive. We shall notice in H.N. an example of how the penultimate type passes easily into the last. The goals of these three types are, respectively, prophetic zeal, union with God, and deification through self-disintegration or mystic death. This

II2 latter attitude excludes concern for the world at large, and can result in quietist antinomianism. Familism tended strongly toward this state of idealized self-disintegration and quietist antinomianism. This is the type of religion which manifested itself particularly strongly within Ranterism though the self-destructive element tended to take a somewhat violent form.

Any particularly intense form of immanentalistic religion--whether pantheistic or panentheistic--leads to a loss of the sense of the reality of history, a loss which leads inevitably to a collapse of the Christian doctrine of salvation because this places the Saving Act of Christ within history, and directs its power toward men who work out their salvation in Time.

Neo-Platonism has since the early days of Christianity provided the paradigm for mystical, and quasi-mystical movements in the West, and in religion's nether world, traces are to be found beneath every up-turned stone. Familism was strongly influenced by this mystical philosophy, and in England, therefore, there was a conjunction of two streams of neo-Platonistic thought, that of Familistically-influenced sects, and that which welled up in Cambridge. We shall turn our eyes to Cambridge in Chapter III.

In the previous chapter a somewhat confused picture of the Ranters emerged, one which we are unlikely to be able altogether to resolve. The picture derives from literature written against the Ranters, and for the most part, designed to put them in the worst possible light. Some of the material is more reliable than the rest as can be felt from its mood and style, and as can be known by comparison with actual Ranter writing. It has become evident that all those designated "Ranter" were not the same, especially in conduct,[1] but also in matters of doctrine. Yet there was a certain general Weltanschauung which the arch-Ranters shared. Some main features of this were that members of their cult were participants in divinity, that they were free of sin, possessing a divine impeccability, that God was not a transcendent Being, and that history was not a pilgrimage from Creation to Final Judgment.

These features of belief and unbelief they shared with the Familists of Love. These, it will be remembered, are at the top of the list of Ranting cults given by Roulston in his Ranters Bible. Indeed, it is the only significant name in the list since the others are hardly heard of again. Fuller in his Church History[2] associated Familists and Ranters, and the characteristics of conduct which Ross ascribes to the Familists in his Pansebeia[3]--an open profession of immorality, and community of women--were those commonly ascribed to

---

[1] Anthony Pearson even calls some of them "pretty people" in a letter to George Fox; see Barclay, Letters of Early Friends (1841), p. 13.

[2] Fuller, Church History (1665), quoted by Whiting sans phrase, op. cit., p. 284.

[3] A. Ross, Pansebeia (1653), pp. 387-389.

II4 Ranters. The features of nakedness and impeccability are conjoined in reference to Familists in at least one seventeenth-century tract.[1] Ranters and Familists are widely and directly compared in contemporary literature, and we have noted examples, not only in the *Ranters Bible* but in four other tracts;[2] and Baxter says that Ranters taught "as the Familists."[3] Scattered through the polemic anti-sect and anti-cult literature of our period, there is frequent grouping together of Familist, Ranter, Seeker, and Quaker. We are therefore justified in looking for some intimate connection between Ranters and the Familists who were on the scene, as we shall notice, a good deal earlier, and who may, therefore, stand in a generative relationship to Ranters.

Who were the Familists? Familists were a widespread group of people belonging to one principal sect and many sub-sects, both in continental Europe (principally in the

---

[1] Anon., *An Account of the Life and Acts of Mr. John Bunyan* (1692), p. 22; Whiting, *op. cit*., p. 284, is led to speculate on the existence of "Ranter Familists" by the conjunction in this tract of the features of impeccability and nakedness. The latter feature is Adamitic, and he wonders whether "Ranter Familists" were also known as "Adamites." In any case, he distinguishes between such and the "real Familists," a distinction for which he advances no argument. He does not explain his use of the term "real," and whether his distinction is of kind or of degree.

[2] John Reading, *The Ranters Ranting* (London, 1650); Anon., *The Arraignment and Tryall* (London, 1650); Anon., *The Bottomles Pit Smoking in Familism* (London, 1651); John Tickell, *Animadversions on Mr. Coppe's Sermon* (London, 1651).

[3] R. Baxter, *Reliquiae Baxterianae* (London, 1696), p. 73; our references are to the London edition of 1925 by Dent, edited by J. M. Thomas.

II5 Netherlands) and in England where the movement had its main development.[1] We do not know all of the Familist sects represented in England: we hear only of the Grindletonians and Hetheringtonians who were supposed to be Familists, according to contemporary accusations, as were the followers of the London preacher, Giles Randall. These flourished during a period extending from the 1620's to the 1670's. But in addition to these existed the Family of the Mount, the Essentialists, the Libertines, Familists of the Castalian Order, Familists of the Valleys, Familists of the Scattered Flock, and Familists of Cap's Order, though perhaps not in England.[2] The movement arose in Holland in Anabaptist circles. Whiting asserts that their founder was the Anabaptist leader David Joris[3] which is something of an overstatement though it has been recognized that Joris had considerable influence on Henry Nicholas (Hendrik Niclaes) the historical founder of the Family. George H. Williams mentions this possibility[4] and quotes John Rogers, "David George (Joris) layde the egg

---

[1] cp. B. Bax, *The Rise and Fall of the Anabaptists* (1903), p. 344; also G.H. Williams, *The Radical Reformation* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1962), p. 789.

[2] cp. J. Knewstub, *A Confutation of certain Monstrous Heresies Taught by H.N.* (1579), unpaginated; E. Pagitt, *Heresiography* (London, 1661), pp. 115-116; A. Ross, *op. cit.*, p. 365; Strype, *Annals*, II, p. 379, quoted by Bax, *op. cit.*, p. 365.

[3] Whiting, *op. cit.*, p. 285.

[4] G.H. Williams, *op. cit.*, Ch. 19, p. 477 ff.

II6 and Henry Niclaes brought forth the chicken."[1] Troeltsch says that Familism arose "alongside" the Jorists,[2] a position maintained by R. Bainton who sees evidence for a close relationship between the two men.[3] Williams sees the Familists as "a group quite distinct" but adds that the English Familists were communitarian, pacifistic Anabaptists, a transitional stage between evangelical Anabaptism and Quakerism.[4] Williams joins Bax in having no reservations at all in saying that Familism was Anabaptist.[5] R. Jones' assertion that the origin of the Familists was entirely independent of the Anabaptist movement seems seriously misguided.[6] The position adopted by this present writer is that Familism was a sect, specifically founded by Henry Nicholas, a close associate of David

---

[1] John Rogers, The Displaying of an Horrible Secte (London, 1579), unpaginated.

[2] Troeltsch, op. cit., vol. II, p. 772.

[3] R. Bainton, David Joris: Wiedertäufer und Kämpfer für Toleranz im 16. Jahrhundert (Leipzig, 1937), p. 74. Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte, Ergänzungsband VI. This, the most thorough of any study yet concluded on Joris, was printed in German, but most of the issue was destroyed in the bombing of Leipzig. The original English typescript has now been copied and deposited in the Libraries of Haverford College, The Union Theological Seminary, and Yale University. References here are to that version.

[4] Williams, op. cit., pp. 477 and 788-789.

[5] B. Bax, op. cit., p. 344, and Williams, op. cit., p. 788.

[6] R. Jones, Studies in Mystical Religion (London: Macmillan, 1923), p. 428.

II7 Joris, and that it was a distinct group on the spiritual left-wing of Anabaptism. The likeness between the principal tenets of the Jorists and the Familists is not difficult to see and will become apparent in the following pages. Troeltsch says that the Jorists and the Familists belonged originally to the realm of frenzied and fanatical mysticism, the teaching of which was closely akin to the main stream of Anabaptistical enthusiasm, but that they settled down into a mystical and "spiritual" movement, and no longer stressed apocalyptic eschatology. He adds that Henry Nicholas swung over into a type of religion which combined the familiar ideas of German mysticism, of "deification" and of "tranquillity," of the "divine Spark" of Light and Love, teaching also an ethic of religious perfection with its victory not only over the "flesh" but over the "letter." Bainton says that rebirth and victory over the letter were the main pillar of Joris' teaching.[1]

H.N. (as he became known, his initials perhaps meaning also homo novus) represented himself as the Prophet of the Last Days, the final stage of the commonly accepted Joachist three eras of world history. These latter days were the Days of the Spirit when the inner reality would dominate, as in the time of Man's Innocency. H.N.'s qualifications for the role were his visionary vocation and his "deification." It is not necessary to give here a more than brief account of the story of H.N.: the original story told in the Mirabilia opera Dei published in English in or about 1575 is substantially retold by Allen C. Thomas[1] and Rufus Jones.[2] The author of the tract was one Tobias, "a Fellow Elder with H.N. in the Household of Love," and was probably translated, as were other Familist writings, by Christopher Vittell, a joiner from Delft who appeared in Colchester in Essex in 1555 as a Familist missionary and Elder.

---

[1] Troeltsch, op. cit., Vol. II, pp. 770-772, and Bainton, op. cit., p. 40.

H.N. is presented as a charismatic personality, gifted in the spirit of wisdom and understanding since his childhood. He was born in January about 1501 in Münster, Westphalia. His father was a devout Roman Catholic who "prayed daily to God in the Temple." Henry was a sensitive and delicate child, educated at home by his mother until he was five, but thereafter sent to a priest for schooling. His zeal for learning sorely tried his health so that he had to relinquish the ordinary pattern of school life. He is said to have spent many hours brooding on the Passion of Christ. When he was eight he asked his father what he thanked God for. His father answered that he thanked him "for forgiveness of sins in Jesus Christ" and "for the true life of godliness made possible by Him." Henry prodigiously replied

---

[1] Allen C. Thomas, "The Family of Love or the Familists," in Haverford College Studies, XII (Fifth Month, 1893), 1-46.

[2] R. Jones, Studies, pp. 428 ff.

II9 that he could not see that sin in man was, in fact, at all bettered. His father fell back upon the orthodox Christian position that one should not doubt the grace of God in Jesus Christ but simply believe. To this the child is said to have responded that he did not doubt that through the death of Christ an entrance into the Kingdom of God had been opened for us, but he thought that only if we followed him in his Passion should we come to the true righteousness. He could not see that the usual teachings of the Faith had healed the rent of sin. His father, being unable to answer him, took him to the Church's representative, a friar, whom Henry asked why, if Christ had died to redeem man, man should be still so unrighteous: why was he not restored to the wholeness and innocency of Adam? The Lutheran doctrine of "imputed righteousness" was, and remained, foreign to him. No one could satisfy him. Then he began to have visions, and it was shown to him that unity with Christ was the way of salvation. In his heavenly trance he saw that he was to be united with many saints in this experience, and that his it was to bring many men to this experiential unity. Later, H.N. came to call himself a "godded" man, and his doctrine was that he and his followers were "godded with God" and that God was "manned" with them.

Henry read, and finally rejected, the teaching of Luther, not only because of their "calumnies against the priesthood of the Roman church," but because he found that they did not convey "the ground of true righteousness and the fulfillment of true godliness in Jesus Christ, and that common people were not restrained by a good and orderly discipline." Luther should have insisted on a church of sanctified believers, he said. Though rejecting Luther, he became an avid reader of the German Bible, evidenced in his work.[1]

He came under suspicion of being a Münsterite Anabaptist, and had to leave Amsterdam and go to Emden. It was there that he became the founder of the House of Love.

It was in Amsterdam that H.N. had met David Joris. He has remained a somewhat enigmatic figure though rather less so since the sympathetic study of him made by Roland Bainton in 1937. Joris, as H.N. after him, saw himself as a prophet raised up by God, in his case, as the Third David, to lead the chosen to their true salvation. He came to be the Prophet of Love, teaching deification; he would raise again the tabernacle of David which was fallen, by the life of inner union, by love, and by meekness.

Jorists and Familists represented and developed aspects of the inward and quietistic elements of Anabaptism, and moved further away than Menno Simons did from the traditional doctrines of Christianity, taking a posture close to that of some of the so-called Spiritual Reformers.

It looks very much as if it was from Joris that the Familists learned their well-known practice of dissimulation.

---

[1] H. Nippold, "Heinrich Niclaes und das Haus der Liebe," in Zeitschrift für die historische Theologie, XXXII (1862), 349.

II11 If the truth were something entirely inward, then it did not matter if one conformed outwardly with other religious orthodoxies, or gave a misleading answer to one's potential persecutors, or kept a non-committal silence. Joris did not believe in martyrdom: one was not committed to an outward cross.[1] In Joris, the "inward" and "spiritual" approach of Franck and the Theologia Germanica is seen to be thoroughly subjective, allowing no test for truth but the inward experience of a quiet spirit.[2] This is how he treated the Creeds and the Bible: "He who has the eternal word of God in his heart needs nothing else."[3] One is reminded of Luther's dictum that "the soul hath a taste for truth as the bee hath for honey."

So it is with the Atonement. The traditional (Lutheran) doctrine of the Atonement Joris thought merely "external" and "outward." Christ must be born within. He taught that the Atonement consisted in inward reconciliation: it is centered in the Incarnation which is to be relived experientially by the believer.[4] Deification is the fruit of this inward life.[5] A man may hope for complete identification with God, to be God with God Himself.[6] "This teaching is in harmony with his

---

[1] R. Bainton, op. cit., pp. 26, 62, and 90.

[2] Ibid., p. 39 f.

[3] Ibid., pp. 90-91.

[4] Ibid., p. 89.

[5] Ibid., p. 74.

[6] Ibid., p. 86.

Sabellianism," says Bainton, "the God of which is the absolute, incomprehensible One of Neo-Platonic mysticism."[1] But David Joris does not seem to have been completely committed to the neo-Platonic outlook as if untouched by the Christian tradition, as we shall see. In the neo-Platonic tradition the universe is an emanation, and therefore, has no independent reality, even a secondary one; and all externalia have the quality of phantasm. The inner reality is unchanging, unmoved by the little storms of human life, unswayed by its passions, undisturbed by its paroxysms, and is thus apathetic and timeless, qualities which belong also to the quietistic life which derives so naturally from this idea. The theology which grows under the neo-Platonic aegis is either a highly stressed immanentalism, or an idealistic pantheism. Pantheism does not envisage a world which had a beginning in time and which will have an end. In this it differs from immanentalism for which time is, indeed real, but for which also, it is unimportant. Thus both streams of thought turn history into an empty husk. By this point of view Joris was deeply affected.

In another way, however, he displays the influence of the Christian way of thought. His spiritual life yet shows some vitality. In the case of the neo-Platonic concept of Deity, the notion of attaining Union with Him does not require moral striving. Only knowledge, psychological training, and

---

[1] *Ibid.*, p. 82.

II13 passive resignation count. This is not the way of the Christian mystics who, though influenced in the framework of their thought by the neo-Platonists, yet strive to become Christ-like in their patience, endeavoring to let their patience reflect Christ's active love. Joris makes much mention of the need for purgative participation in the Passion. He had learned something from the mystics. Something of this passes over to H.N. but in a lesser degree, as we shall see, for with the continued interiorizing of the Word, and the continued pressure of neo-Platonistic thought, with the consequent undermining of the significance of history, the historical Passion of Jesus fades, and the importance of it recedes. This seems to result in a more passive form of quietism than was found in the Jorists. It is hard to explain why it is that the importance of Jesus' Passion did not fade in Joris to the extent that it did in H.N. Only an intimate knowledge of the man could conceivably give an answer to this.

However, under this neo-Platonic monistic influence, Joris' sense of the progress of history is emasculated. Eschatology itself becomes spiritualized: the strife of the Great Day consists in the conquest of self, in the putting off the old man, in the imitation of Christ through the new birth.

> This is the true day. The light of life of the coming time in eternity must take place inwardly. The outward day does not bring life and joy. . . . It is impossible to come to the day of the light of the sun without first being dead and blind in the night of hell, from which one must rise to the life of the day in the glorious understanding of God.

II14 It is within that the trumpets must sound, and within that the dead must be raised. The dies irae, dies illa is, similarly, an inward experience:

> Death, the devil, hell and damnation take place not without but within a man. The devil or Satan has no power outside the man. I say that he is nothing but a vain lying principle, and I do not believe in him, since he is not. He cannot help me but can hinder, yet not of himself but through myself as an enemy. Can he do anything apart from God or outside of man? I say, absolutely no. Hell lies not without a man but in the man, in his innermost flesh and conscience where the worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched.[1]

How far is all this from the Anabaptism of Melchior! However, it does seem that Joris did not always hold this position. Before he became the quietistic spiritual, he was an enthusiast of the principal Melchiorite type. He dreamed dreams and saw visions, he saw himself called of God and chosen; he was appointed to open mysteries with David's Key, and he was, according to the order of the times, the Third David. He was, in fact, in the major tradition of Anabaptist messianic figures. However, he underwent a change. He passed from an enthusiasm to a form of quietism. Bainton calls him a "quietistic mystic," and says that Franck helped him make the transition.[2]

---

[1] Ibid., pp. 42-43. Bainton here quotes Joris.

[2] Ibid., p. 15. "Quietistic mystic" is an unhappy term. Mystics who strive for Union with the Trinity are not quietist. Quietism is linked both to spiritual inspirationism and to some types of "inward religion." It is also linked to pantheism. We shall notice this later on. For comment on "spiritualists" and "mystics" see G.A. Johnson, "From Seeker to Finder," Ch. XVII (December, 1948), 299-315.

II15 Here it will be as well to digress at some length and to consider what is here implied before returning to David Joris and H.N. It will help us later on in our consideration of Familism and Ranterism.

It is not to be assumed that Joris ceased to be an enthusiast when he became more quietist. "Enthusiasm" is one term for at least two types of spirituality. The term means "god-filled" or "spirit-filled," and there are at least two principal ways of having this experience.

One kind of Christian enthusiast stands truly in the Biblical tradition. He is a man that God breathes upon. The Ruach of God comes mightily upon him. He is a man possessed. He is under the compulsion of divine inspiration. He is driven by his sense of unworthiness to surrender his will, to offer himself to God as his servant. For God's spirit does not deprive a man of his independence and freedom. A man may remain, if he choose, the prisoner of his own independence, in bondage to his own will. But when the trumpet sounds in the city, who shall not be afraid, and when the lion roars, who shall not prophesy? The call of the divine Word seems almost completely overpowering but the Biblical tradition does not present enthusiasts, such as the prophets, as other than free men, in the ordinary sense of that term, even if undertones and overtones resonate together on the note of freedom. The word of the Lord comes to a man, touches his heart, illumines his understanding, sets before him a choice, challenges his will. And though the might of

II16 God cause a man to quake, a mere creature confronted by his Creator, yet he is not destroyed. It was said of olden time that no man can see God and live, yet enthusiasm has declared, even in olden time, that no man can live until he has seen God.

This tradition tells us that to see God is to know him as Master of the world and Lord of history. Orion and the Pleiades were set in the heavens by him, and it was he who sent the circling planets singing on their way. He it was who brought the world to birth, overcoming the darkness of chaos and setting man in the clear light of day. As he brought the world to be, so he preserves it according to his will, shewing forth the mysteries of his providence; and so He will bring it to its appointed end. It will end in fire, in judgment, in perdition; but for some, in salvation. In the collapse of the heavens, the sun and the moon will fall, but God's Rule will remain, and His Righteousness will endure. No faithful soul need have fear other than is natural to his frail human condition. He can be sure that the pilgrim will come to his reward. The thought of the Judgment fills him with pious awe, and its certainty with hope. Not for him the terrors or hopelessness of a meaningless life. Not for him to wander in the desert of a deserted world. If he have doubts, they are swallowed up in the immensity of the Being of God, and in the impenetrable mysteries of the divine Providence. The written Law of God will guide his steps. But what if he fall? What if the Law become a stumbling

II17 stone or a rock of offence? Then he turns his eye to the Cross to see there both the assurance of the divine Compassion, and the seal of the divine Love.

So is the Christian view of life which the pentecostal type or pneumatic enthusiast possesses, a philosophy which he shares with all those Christians who stand in the unmixed Hebrew and Biblical tradition. But it is in his intense awareness of God's Spirit that he is singled out from his brothers. He is singularly Spirit conscious. God's Spirit fills the whole world: it blows about like the wind, sometimes softly, sometimes sharply. It is a potent visitation of the uncreate upon the creaturely, of the immortal upon the mortal, of the eternal upon the temporal. It is a force which cannot be contained. It can rock the foundations of sense, and disturb the delicate balance of reason. A man possessed may be mistaken for a madman. He sees what others do not;he divines what his brothers cannot; words split asunder as he utters them, unable to bear the sense. Such a visitation cannot be asked for or even desired. It may be as the gentle blowing of a refreshing breeze upon a wearied soul, or it may be as the blast of a tempest and a whirlwind. But the result is to invest the enthusiast with a powerful sense of vocation, and to lead him to an ecstatic abandonment of his own interests and safety. He must declare his Word because the Word within him will burst forth. This becomes the most important activity of his life. So he learns to wait, to wait on the movement of the Spirit.

II18 Thus it comes to be with those people who group themselves about an enthusiastic leader, and who hope to participate in the charisma.[1] They learn to wait together until the descent of the Spirit, until the prophet be moved to give utterance.

Groups have arisen which were merely descended in tradition from the leadership of a noted enthusiast, such as the Montanists came to be and which were not groups individually centered upon one particular person having spiritual gifts. In this case, the custom of waiting on the Spirit remains, and sometimes there is a tendency to provoke the Spirit's descent by singing or public praying or preaching. Infectious excitement is a powerful element in such a situation, and people may come to imagine that the Spirit has descended. Then there is no end to ecstatic utterance and to prophecies, and perhaps to groanings and howlings and writhings and foamings. Such was the stamp of early Quaker meetings, and the Quakers were paragons of restraint in comparison with some groups. Exaggerations are bound to occur. The St. Gall Anabaptists provide an illustration. They became frenzied antinomians, exhibiting a degeneration into rank spiritualism. Filled with Spirit, and having no need of sacred Writings or Law, they actually burned the pages of Holy Writ. Some fell

---

[1] There is no need here to enumerate the many enthusiastic movements in Christian history. An adequate account of them is to be found in R. Knox, Enthusiasm (New York, 1950). However, this book should be treated with caution, both because of his Roman Catholic prejudices and also because of his inadequate knowledge of source material: he says on page 141, for example, "The Ranters have left no literature to defend themselves. . . ."

II19 into comas, simulating death with Christ, some practiced glossolalia, and some fell into unchastity.

There have been those who have felt themselves fully possessed of the Spirit to the extent of being persuaded that they had become Apocalyptic Figures such as the Angel of the Apocalypse, or Elias, or Enoch,[1] the Messiah himself, or even God the Father, as Hermann Schoenmaker.[2] The opportunities for megalomania afforded by unrestrained enthusiasm are indeed immense.

Over against this ferment, some sort of quietism associates itself with enthusiasm. Quietism in the context of pneumatic enthusiasm is mere waiting on the Spirit, a waiting

---

[1] Williams, *op. cit.*, p. 358. John Mathijs insisted on being regarded as Enoch, "and with great and desperate curses cast all into hell and to the devils for eternity who would not hear his voice . . . and accept him as the true Enoch."

[2] Bainton, *op. cit.*, offers the form "Hermann Schoemaker." See p. 50; cf. G.H. Williams, *op. cit.*, p. 443, and as a general reference, N. Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium*.
The latter claim, if made in sanity, is a difficult one to discuss without primary evidence. We noticed this phenomenon in the previous chapter, the case of John Robins. The *nature* of the claim is important to our understanding of the spirituality involved. One Al Hallaj, the Sufi saint, was martyred for a claim which sounded somewhat similar: "I am He Whom I love, and He Whom I love is myself." "When I say honor, praise, and glory be to God, I speak in a metaphor, for I utter these praises to myself." But Hallaj was a Sufi and a pantheist; he was not a spirit-centered enthusiast. For him, God was manifested in all things, and most nobly in man. His was probably an adaptation of neo-Platonic mysticism (though R.C. Zaehner believes the influence to be that of the Vedanta). This represents a type of spirituality which has indeed had an effect upon one aspect of Christian spirit-centeredness, namely, mysticism, but which has always been tempered to some degree by Christian teachings on mystical union with the historical Jesus who was also divine, involving a participation in his Passion and Resurrection. Since we do not know directly of H. Schoenmaker's type of spirituality, we do not know for certain that he actually belongs in this stream of fermenting enthusiasm.

II20 either for rushing, mighty winds and flames of fire, or else for openings, and convictions, and consolations. Surrender to the Spirit in these circumstances is, ideally at least, a movement towards cooperation. Freedom of choice lies with the devout waiter, together with responsibility for that choice and for what follows it. "My spirit truly waiteth upon God: for my hope is in Him." Such is the simple faith.

But before concluding this epitome of enthusiasm of the penumatic sort, one more characteristic must be mentioned. This is the tendency for a man or a group to believe that he or they alone possess the truth. He or they alone possess the authentic Word. Only this message is relevant to a decaying world. This is the chosen man, this the chosen people, and this, only this, the Promised Land. If a man would be saved, he must hear *this* message, and become one of the chosen few, the faithful remnant. This is the message and mission to the world. Pneumatic enthusiasm is, at heart, messianic. Sometimes this messianism takes a violent form in the belief that the Kingdom of God can be taken by force, a trait illustrated by the early history of Anabaptism. The post-Reformation air was heavy with the conviction that the new age had dawned, that the epoch of the Spirit was come. The Pope had been overthrown, his Babylonish palace shaken; there were goanings and rustlings in the pastures, murmurings in the villages. Great happenings were at the portals and princes trembled for their thrones. There were not lacking prophets in every town, men who were fomenters of revolution, II21 men who would throw over every bastion of worldly and even ecclesiastical authority, who would trample down anything and everything which would serve as a dyke against a sea of spiritualistic anarchy. Not that these men thought in terms of anarchy. Their concern was to prepare a place and a people for the Spirit's freedom, and for God's own possession. They read the New Testament. They meditated on Pentecost. They considered the early Church--where men had all things in common, and no man lacked anything. They bethought themselves of the Beginning, of the times of man's Innocency, when God walked in the Garden, and where Man and Woman walked together in their nakedness, and were not ashamed.[1] Such bliss, they thought, could be recaptured. In the regeneration, when the Spirit was come again with power, so would things be again. The prophets of the new age who arose were men like Joris, calling their fellows to rebirth and to rebaptism, and to share in the new society where the joys of Eden could be regained. To have all things in common, to share the innocence of the Garden, to be filled with Spirit--such was the ideal of the Anabaptists and their friends.[2] To found a new world--nothing else would do.

Such have been the main characteristics of pneumatic enthusiasm, inspired in nature, apocalyptic in vision,

---

[1] The demonstrative act of public nakedness, or Adamatism, was sometimes indicative of this.

[2] cf. H.S. Bender, "The Anabaptist Vision," in Ch. XIII (March, 1944), 3-24. These characteristics were also to be found among the Brethren of the Free Spirit. See N. Cohn, _op. cit._, _passim_.

II22 eschatological in purpose. It has been at the very heart of Christianity, at times scarcely and hardly contained within the ecclesiastical structure, periodically bursting out into sectarianism, asserting its own freedom to proclaim the Advent of the Kingdom, and the era of the Spirit. The praying Church has always sung, and continues to sing the "Veni creator spiritus sancti" knowing that its true life is the life from above, that Nature, without Grace, is dead.

But there is another type of enthusiasm which may also claim to be Biblical, being at least as ancient as St. Paul's teaching. This has been given the name of "spiritual religion" by Rufus Jones and others. The term has become an ambiguous one because it has been used to describe a whole family of spiritualities united only by their emphasis upon "inwardness" of religious life. This is unfortunate because the term itself is a good one. Spiritual religion is centered on the notion of the persistent ubiquity and indwelling of God, "in whom we live and move and have our being" and who indwells us "making intercession for us with unutterable groanings." Immanence, therefore, is the key term. As in the enthusiasm previously described, this spirituality envisages Nature possessed by Spirit. It is God and Nature. Nature is God's work: the invisible may be perceived through the visible. Biblically based Christianity has always balanced its doctrine of divine transcendence against the experience of divine immanence. This experience of the immanent God is given by Grace and is not the work of

II23 Nature. In this type of spirituality the experience of God is of a reposing within or welling up from beneath, "a well of water springing up into eternal life." It is, by its nature, a quieter form of religious manifestation than pneumatic enthusiasm. The faithful one does not wait for the descent of the Dove but for the awakening of a light within. If pneumatic enthusiasm may be typified by the word "ecstatic," spiritual religion may be typified by the term "enstatic,"[1] though the term should not be taken to imply any radical lack of activism. Spiritual searching, self-emptying, self-abnegation, and moral effort are all associated with this experience. Men have been moved "in the Spirit" to perform mighty works. The type of quietism associated here is repose in the Spirit: a waiting in the Spirit for the manifestation of the Spirit in wisdom, counsel, ghostly strength, in knowledge and fear of the Lord. The "life of the Spirit" is an interior life but is not without external effects. The opening of the inner man to new visions and understandings will lead him to rise up and prophesy. It is likely that his message will be, "Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God;" "If your enemy take away your cloak, give him also your coat"; "If he strike you on one cheek, give him also the other." However, "yieldedness" (*Gelassenheit*) should not be confused

---

[1] This term appears to have been invented by R.C. Zaehner in his *Mysticism: Sacred and Profane* (New York: Oxford University Press, Galaxy, 1961), *passim*.

II24 with passivity. Passivity is not a term that is congruent with a religious experience which, while knowing God within, knows him also as a transcendent Being with Whom the soul enjoys a living relationship, to Whom he makes an active surrender, and by Whom he will be judged. Passivity belongs to a different type of religious experience altogether as we shall notice later on.

One would not wish to assert that the gospel ethic of surrender to one's fellow belongs only to the man of "inner" spiritual life. The pneumatic enthusiast may also be moved to such a self-forgetfulness, to such self-spending pity. We shall see an example of this in the arch-Ranter, Abiezer Coppe. But, on balance, "yieldedness" is more the characteristic of the former than of the latter. The former will never resort to violence in God's name: for him, God's kingdom, when it comes, will come quietly, sweetly, secretly, and within.

The difference between pneumatic enthusiasm and spiritual religion, as we have so far described them, may be merely one of emphasis, mood, and expression. But though their theological assumptions are similar, one emphasizing divine transcendence and the other divine immanence, they remain distinctive spiritual types.

It is well known that Christian immanentalism lent itself easily in the early days to a certain degree of assimilation with Gnosticism, and with neo-Platonic thought. Both of these appear to have made some lasting contribution to

II25 Christian faith and spirituality, the former partly in terms of the Church's possession of "the mind of Christ," related to claims of infallibility in both Church and sect, and the latter in providing an intellectual and philosophical foundation for the Christian teaching of divine immanence, and for Christian mysticism.[1] Plotinus' notion of the universe, that it is emanated rather than created, implies the doctrine of "God or Nature" rather than "God and Nature." The universe expresses the divine Being, and it is the ground of the human soul. The implications of this were worked out into a scheme of mysticism in terms of the celebrated *via negativa* by the Pseudo-Dionysius whose influence, together with that of St. Augustine, was felt all through the Middle Ages. This influence has given a lasting shape to Christian attitudes towards prayer and mysticism. The distinction between the neo-Platonic "God or Nature" and the Christian "God and Nature" is a vital one involving the difference between salvation by nature and salvation by Grace. For the neo-Platonist union with God is by nature, a metaphysical union, there being no distinction in essence between the Divine and its manifestation. But for the Christian, union with God implies union of will, and union of love. In the realm of prayer it is the difference between communing with God or with one's own true self. However,

---

[1] By "mysticism" here we do not refer so much to the ecstatic Beatific Vision as to the enstatic experience of Union.

II26 this vital distinction, pregnant with possibilities in the realm of ethical life, has been sometimes glossed over in the teaching of the mystics, and in the life of "inward religion." The means by which this has been done is provided by the doctrine of the indwelling Christ, not only as Person but as Logos, the meeting point of neo-Platonism and Greek theology.

Troeltsch explains that the doctrine of mystical union with God or the indwelling of Christ is the very heart and basis of all practical religious achievement, and the radiating center of religious ethics. The Spiritual Reformers interpreted the Jesus of history and the mystically discerned Christ of experience by the more general principle of the Logos incarnate in Christ, through whom they were brought into contact with the eternal living fulness of God.[1] Here we meet the experience that knows God not only through the things that are made but within them; it sees God in Nature, and he is known through an immediate apprehension of Reason and not by a reasoning process. Actually, the language of spiritual religion derives more from religious experience than from philosophical reflection though much use is made of language which has a philosophical sound. But this language is frequently so hazy that it is hard to tell the precise nature of the doctrine which is being taught. Still, one is tempted to see some form or degree of pantheism masquerading as Christian doctrine in the teaching of

---

[1] Troeltsch, op. cit., pp. 737-738.

II27 the Spiritual Reformers.[1] We shall here take a swift glance at some points of Sebastian Franck's teaching since it was he who influenced David Joris in his transition from pneumatic enthusiasm to quietist inner religion.[2]

Franck was a child of the Renaissance, humanist and, in some sense, a mystic. In the Renaissance tradition he gave man a central position in the order of things and saw him as exemplifying the divine. At some point he was a Lutheran but became unorthodox. It was early in his career that he began to contrast the Spirit and the Letter, the outer and the inner man; and he came to feel that salvation lay not in imputed righteousness but in actual righteousness and in sanctification. He was influenced by Denck, Bünderlin, and Schwenckfeld.

Says Jones: He aspired towards a faith "which will dispense with eternal preaching, ceremonies, sacraments, bann, and office as unnecessary, and which seeks solely to gather among all peoples an invisible, spiritual Church in the unity of the Spirit and of faith, to be governed wholly by the eternal, invisible Word of God, without external means." He thought that the Apostolic Church was like this. With respect to teaching he thought that we "ought always to notice what God says in us. . . ." for he saw that any point of view could be defended by Biblical texts, and stressed

---

[1] One must approach this consideration with caution, however, for it is noteworthy that G.H. Williams, in his vast book on the Radical Reformation finds scarcely an occasion to mention the term "Pantheism."

[2] I depend here largely on R. Jones, Spiritual Reformers, pp. 46-63.

II28 that the spirit of scripture must be felt, and the sense tested against one's inner feeling.

Franck refers to Plato, Plotinus, and Hermes Trismegistus as his teachers. There is a divine element within us. It is the real source of religious experience and the eternal basis of the soul's salvation. He gives it many names: Word of God; Power of God; Mind of Christ; Divine Activity; Divine Origin; Inward Light; True Light; Lamp of the Soul. "The inward Light is nothing else than the Word of God, God Himself, by whom all things were made, and by whom all men are enlightened." This inner power is not a capricious, subjective impulse or vision, and it is not to be discovered in sudden ecstatic experiences.

Reports Jones: It is a common ground and essence for God and man. It is God as the immanent Ground of all that is permanently real,

> . . . and at the same time this divine endowment forms the fundamental nature of man's soul--"Gottes Wort ist in der menschlichen Natur angelegt" (*Apologia*, p. 2, to *Das verbütschierte Buch*) and is the original substance of our being. Consciousness of God and consciousness of self have one fundamental source in this deep where God and man are unsundered.

It is plain that Franck has been influenced by the Mystics, themselves influenced by Pseudo-Dionysius. Hence, in accord with the neo-Platonic tradition, he regards the world as shadow rather than reality.

Franck, having this belief in the immediate presence of the divine in the soul has no patience with reasoning. He does not condemn Reason as such because that is the divine

II29 Light within. As for Scripture, it is but ink and paper.

Plainly, there is something of a tendency to pantheism here. Franck, as we have previously noted, admits to his dependency not only upon Plato, but more tellingly, upon Plotinus, and Hermes Trismegistus (the aim of the latter being the deification of man through the "Gnosis," the knowledge of God).

One of the effects of Plotinus' pantheistic teaching, as indeed of the Idealistic teaching of Plato, is to undermine a sense of the reality of this world. The stress on the "inner" to the detriment of, rather than to the complement of, the "outer" is something we shall meet again in the work of Peter Sterry at Cambridge, and John Everard in mid-seventeenth century England. But here it may be observed that such teaching can have a disastrous effect upon the human psychology since it tends to rob human life in the world of an intrinsic sense of worth. Only if a man have a powerful spiritual life in which his union with the "inner" is most positive and assured can he survive this emasculation of the "outer." But on the other hand, if his inner life be indeed truly strong, he can be immensely fortified against the vagaries of Fate and the disasters and miseries of human life. If he treasure a real hope of "deification" whether by consciousness of the extant union of the inner substance with the Divine, or in the sense of perfectly exhibiting the Divine Image--notions which appear to be combined in Familism--his hope which is a hope "set in the heavens" is

II30 one which can indeed transform the quality of the life he leads. He will be ready, even eager, to forsake this world and the glory of it, and choose self-emptying and humiliation and service. But this requires a most sensitive spirit. A grosser nature will rather choose a life of retreat and abandonment of responsibility, for he will not see the restoration of the Divine Image in him in terms of humility and self-abandonment in being a "man for others," but will rely instead upon some hazy form of mystical transformation, the self being only passively involved. Pantheism, and even mere extreme immanentalism, are quite likely to lead to this negative attitude, and to the worst kind of quietism. Probably Molinos is the most famous example.[1] In his account of the spiritual life he found the state of perfection in perpetual union with God and complete transformation into him. All external observances he found a hindrance--all mortification and even resistance to temptation. He was, therefore, thoroughly antinomian, and antinomian in the worst sense. Molinos thought that the state of perfection was to be attained by the complete annihilation of the will. His teaching, in his office of spiritual advisor to religious, brought chaos into the convents. He finally had to be imprisoned on charges of an antinomian, immoral life.

In this type of radical quietism, then, passive prayer expresses the height of perfection. Once a man has, through

---

[1] cp. R. Knox, op. cit., pp. 295-318.

II31 this perversion of the *via negativa*, attained to union with God, as he thinks, sin is impossible, for then all he does or thinks is the work of God. The devil may, indeed, tempt him, and even compel him to commit actions that would be sinful in others, but when his will has become entirely annihilated they cease to be sins in him. Mystic death to the world is the aim, and the man who reaches this condition must be careful to avoid distraction by involvement with the affairs of the world.[1] Such is the result of a pantheism, or an unbalanced "inwardness," that rejects the principle that God, though he may dwell in the earth, is also in the heavens, over against his creation; to which the authentic Christian gospel adds the promise of Judgment.

We embarked upon this discussion of enthusiasm in its two forms and of pantheism at the point where we referred to Joris' change, under Franck's influence, from pneumatic enthusiast to a man of "inner religion." We now see that this implies a shift from concentration on the transcendent but descending Spirit, to Spirit immanent, and even further, to a stress on divine human nature. Joris came to stand in the shadowy middle-ground between Christian faith and pagan philosophy, stressing that kind of inwardness which is apt to produce a nihilistic quietism. We have mentioned already

---

[1] *Ibid*., pp. 231-287. For more ancient examples of divinized impeccability see S. Runciman, *The Medieval Manichee* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1947), pp. 21 ff. on the Messalians; and Hasting's *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics* (1912), Vol. V, "Euchites" by Jas. Strahan.

II32 how he interiorized the Creeds and Scripture, apparently as the result of a disbelief in the reality of time, and therefore of history as a pilgrimage from Creation to Judgment.

He tends, then, to radical quietism, but the transition is still incomplete. There remains an element of searching, some striving to realize the Passion of Jesus in life, some pressing for the divine Union. Joris' doctrine of inwardness does not seem to be pantheistic though this is that which quietism may espouse. He is a man "of the Inward Word," a man for whom men might become "godded." This position comes close to pantheism but is not pantheistic. Union is not possible for the pantheist: what is possible is only the loss of the illusion of individual essence. Union requires moral striving, self-exertion towards self-surrender.[1] It requires the offering up of a will in a union of love, not the extinction of the will altogether. Pantheistic unification calls for the disintegration of the self, for its dissolution in the One. It can justify capitulation and moral collapse, and indeed, makes virtues out of both. It can be a strange philosophy to embrace. Later on in this work we shall have to consider what are the influences which may lead a person to this condition.

There is no sign of amoral antinomianism in Joris. He specifically condemns it, for example, in his letter to

---

[1] R. Bainton, op. cit., p. 74.

II33 Jan Ariens.[1] As for strange moral variants, such as polygamy, and exhibitionistic nudity, deviations from the norm which were commonly justified by reference to the cavortings of the Patriarchs, he felt that "the eccentricities and immoralities of the Patriarchs were due to a special dispensation no longer valid apart from special revelation."[2] (Here, of course, was a weak point: any man could claim a "special revelation" and presumably did so whenever he felt moved to perpetrate either of these sometimes convenient but inappropriate activities). Joris follows the Joachimite "three ages" by teaching that the first age was polygamous, the second monogamous (the present), and the third, of the Spirit, will be celibate. However, Roland Bainton believes that the evidence points to the existence of polygamy among the Jorists, holding this holier than monogamy since it was in imitation of the Patriarchs, as aforesaid.[3] As for a "community of women" there is no evidence that the Jorists practiced such, and Joris himself specifically denies the accusation in very injured tones. Bainton believes the Jorists slandered. However, it must be remembered that Joris and his followers, like the Familists emerged from a context of pneumatic enthusiasm and revivalism, in which extremism in behavior was common, and antinomianism, even of

---

[1] Ibid., p. 75.

[2] Ibid., p. 76.

[3] Ibid., p. 78.

II34 the immoral sort, was by no means unknown. It must occasion no surprise, therefore, if these superficially exciting and attractive tendencies should continue to manifest themselves even after these movements had made themselves distinct as particular Anabaptist sects. But Joris himself seems to have been neither pneumatic nor quietist to the point of immorality or amorality.

* * * * *

It is time now to return to H.N. and the story of the Family of Love.

H.N., it may be remembered, left Amsterdam where he had known Joris, and went to Emden where he established his sect. Here, it was, that Henry Nicholas began calling himself H.N. (*homo novus*?) as a testament to his deification.

He was a man "of reasonable tall stature, somewhat grosse of bodie" and "brave in his apparell" of a "crimson satin doublet" and long beard.[1] Here, at Emden, as already said, he gained his first converts. The period which follows has left almost no traces of itself: the events of twenty years of H.N.'s life, during which his sect seems to have flourished, from his thirty ninth to his fifty ninth year, are largely unknown. Coornheert testifies, however, that H.N. travelled much. He employed printers in Antwerp, and then established his own works in Kampen. Substantial

---

[1] Quoted from Charlotte Fall-Smith's collection of contemporary reminiscences by Williams, *op.cit.*, p. 479.

II35 quantities of pamphlets were issued in Dutch which were subsequently translated into German, Latin, French, and English. In his fifty ninth year legal action was taken against him by the council of Emden from which he took refuge. He then sent a reply to their charges denying authorship of any heretical books. Nippold[1] severely rebukes this example of equivocation, or rather, of unmitigated falsehood, but in the history of the Familists this attitude towards what ordinary men call truth became very well known.

At this time, about 1553, some have guessed that he went to England to spread his gospel[2] where Familism is said to have enjoyed its greatest success.[3] H.N.'s writings were translated and published in English in 1575 and reprinted in 1649 when Ranterism was at its peak. The sect had gained a footing in England as early as 1570. Little is known of its history between this date and the time of the Commonwealth.[4] Here, we must make mention of the elements in the House of Love which are of most interest to us, but we shall not recount the story in all its detail.[5]

---

[1] Nippold, *op. cit.*, quoted by A.C. Thomas.

[2] A.C. Thomas, *op. cit.*, p. 10; cf. G.H. Williams, *op. cit.*, p. 482.

[3] Williams, *op. cit.*, p. 789; cf. B. Bax, *op. cit.*, p. 344. It also spread into Frisia, Holland, Brabant, Flanders, and France; cf. Williams, *op. cit.*, p. 480.

[4] But the Familists petitioned James I for protection in 1606, soon after his accession.

[5] Readers desiring the whole story should consult Nippold, *op. cit.*, and A.C. Thomas, *op. cit.* Attenuated versions are to be found in Williams, *op. cit.*, pp. 478-482, and R. Jones, *Studies*, pp. 428-448.

1136 H.N.'s travels, as previously mentioned, are recorded in the Mirabilia opera Dei by Tobias, a Fellow Elder, and it tells also of H.N.'s new revelation in his sixty fifth year. His journeyings were to be a preparation for the new birth in Christ, a new birth which all future Elders must likewise experience. He was to appoint twenty four Elders and four "Seraphim" to be his companions on his voyage; this indicated his spiritual journeyings. The Elders were given holy names such as Abia, God's fatherly will; Colia, his voice; Foelicitas, his holiness; Gabriel, his strength, etc. The four Seraphim, H.N.'s Guardians, were also given such names. The Family was highly organized into an hierarchical order, there being three lower orders of priesthood in addition to the Elders and the Seraphim; an ecclesiasticism run riot. It is extraordinary to see such a phenomenon in a movement dedicated to inwardness. No doubt this is a self-contradictory element which shortened the life of the House of Love.

The course of spiritual attainment for Familists was mapped out likewise in the form of a spiritual journey which, on its forty-ninth day (seven times seven) was nearly completed. On that day the faithful one would rest with Christ in his death and burial, and on the fiftieth day, he would receive a new command. Now he receives God's Spirit and understanding, an understanding beyond all human power. In this condition he was to serve H.N. who was to him as Moses, through whom God spoke. The disciples were to be obedient to

II37 the Love.[1] Such men were "godded with God," and God "manned in them." This all has the appearance of elaborate ceremonial.

Ceremonies he declares are in their right form and use;

> . . . set forth, administered and taught by them that are chosen or raised up thereunto by God, which follow after Christ in his death, because renewed with him in a new life, and in whom the living God with his Christ hath evenso then obtained his dwelling and shape, from whose bodies likewise the words of God and Christ, do then flow forth as living water, which also concordably agree with the testimonies of the Holy Ghost, and with our writings and their requiring; as also with the requiring of the law, of the prophets, and of the Apostles of Christ.[2]

H.N. appears to have died about 1570.

Christopher Vittels, a joiner from Delft, seems to have been the Familists' chief missionary in England. We earlier noted his appearance in Colchester by 1555. He translated many of H.N.'s pamphlets into English, and by 1574 the sect had made marked headway in the eastern counties.

John Rogers in 1579 published an unpaginated work, The Displaying of an Horrible Secte of Grosse and Wicked Heretiques naming themselves the Family of Love. It is written in a calm and convincing manner, and testifies that there were about 2,000 Familists at that time. He knows by report of a book by H.N., "The glasse of righteousness (the lesse, for

---

[1] "The service of Love" which is the term which predominates in Familists texts to describe their ethic is the equivalent of "Gelassenheit" or "yieldedness" in other Anabaptist writings according to Williams, op. cit., p. 482.

[2] Evangelium Regni, XXXVII, E, 12.

II38 he compiled two books of that title) wherein he certifieth his Familie of Love, that they must pass foure most terrible castels ful of cumbersome enimies, before they come to the house of loue; the first is Iohn Calvine, the second the Papistes, the third Martin Luther, the fourth the Anabaptistes."[1]

An interesting sketch of the sect drawn from a confession made by two Familists before a magistrate on 28 May, 1561, is given by Rogers, and it is as follows;

> They are all unlearned, save some who can read English and are made bishops, elders, and deacons, who call them to one of the disciples houses; thirty in number assemble to hear the Scriptures expounded. They have goods in common, new members are received with a kiss, all have meat, drink, and lodging found by the owner of the house where they meet. They knock, saying, Here is a Brother or Sister in Christ. The congregation does not speak until admitted to do so. They go to church, but object to the Litany that says, Lord, have mercy upon us miserable sinners, as if they could never be amended. They may not say God speed, God morrow, or God even. They did prohibit bearing of weapons, but at length allowed the bearing of staves. When a question is demanded of any, they stay a great while ere they answer, and commonly their word shall be Surely or So. The marriage is made by the brethren, who sometimes bring them together who live over a hundred miles asunder, as Thomas Chaundler of Woneherst, Surrey, who sent for a wife from the Isle of Ely by two of the congregation. They had never met before, and in a year they, upon a disliking did divorce themselves asunder before certain of the congregation. No man is to be baptized before the age of thirty. Until then he is an infant. Heaven and hell are present in this world among us. They are bound to give alms only to their own sect. All men not of their congregation or revolted from them are as dead. Bishops and ministers

---

[1] The *glasse of righteousness* is not to be confused with the *Introduction to the Holy Understanding of the Glasse of Righteousness* which is a later book. A copy of the former was found among George Fox's collection of books.

II39

> should not remain still in one place but should wander from country to country. They hold there was a world before Adam's time. No man should be put to death for his opinions, and they therefor condemn Cranmer and Ridley for burning Joan of Kent. They expound Scripture according to their own minds, comparing one place with another.
>
> They brag very much of their own sincere lives, justifying themselves, saying, mark how purely we live. If they have anything to do touching temporal things, they must do it by advice, viz., ask counsel of the Lord through one of their bishops or elders. They give their alms by putting under a hat upon a table what they are disposed to give, and the money is secretly distributed by the bishops or elders.[1]

Here are some other points which Rogers heard or knew firsthand about Familists, that is, Familism in England. (There seems to be, unfortunately, almost no information about the beliefs and practices of groups elsewhere after the death of H.N.).

They believed that since the Apostles' time the Word of God was never preached truly, nor any justice upon earth.

Of four prophets two are just, David Joris and John of Leyden, and two unjust, the Bishop of Rome and Luther.

H.N. is infallible as Moses, the prophets, Christ and his Apostles.

The Elders are illuminated and deified, and God in them hominified.

The illuminate Elders do not sin either actually or by cogitation.

They hold that God's Law can be kept by anyone who endeavors.

---

[1] The spelling has been modernized, and is that quoted by G.H. Williams, op. cit. et loc. cit.

II40 Only H.N. knows the true sense of Scripture, of which his books are the equivalent.

The Scriptures are fulfilled in H.N. and his Family: "This is assuredly the heartie mercifulnesse of God over us, nowe in the last time, to the end the glorious Lordlynesse of God should in us become manifested and declared, and the Scripture fulfilled."

All new members were brought into the Family communion, which met at night; the householder, who fed everybody, was called a "Raab."

Only new members, weaklings, were permitted to pray.

There should be no Sabbath day, but all should be alike, for they said "The Sonne of man is Lord over the Sabbath day."

They hold that as God made heaven and earth by Jesus Christ, the Word, so did he it by them.

They hold themselves to be Maries, and say that Christ is come forth in their flesh, even as he came forth of the Virgin Mary.

"If any of them be convented for his opinion, and doeth denie the same by open recantation: he taketh that to be a glorie unto him, as though he had suffered persecution in this doing: and yet still inwardly mainteyning these opinions."[1] Perhaps the most striking item in this credal

---

[1] A.C. Thomas, op. cit., p. 24, quotes Anon., Tracts on Liberty of Conscience, "Persecution for Religion, Judged and Condemned" (1615). "The Familists who say that religion consists not in outward things, and therefore they would submit to any outward service, and they that do not so are justly persecuted."

II41 compendium is the note that only weaklings were allowed to pray!

Here, let us proceed to some brief references to H.N.'s own writings. They do not contain all that is alleged to be Familist teaching but this is not to say that the allegations are false. There is no indication that close control was exercised over groups of Familists of the various varieties, and it is to be expected that Familist teaching, stressing subjectivism as it did, would develop differently in its different locales.

H.N.'s *An Introduction to the Holy Understanding of the Glasse of Righteousnesse* (no place, printer or date) refers to H.N.'s call to be a prophet, and to call the elect into the Family of Love.

He teaches that Law and Prophets are not abolished by "the Belief" but when men are established in it, the "Service of Law ceases."

God's Being is the Life, Bread, and Communion of Christ's Body, which the Disciples did eat of.

The Kingdom of God has come, in the form of the Family of Love. Christ has come in the Resurrection of the dead (i.e., in the spiritual rebirth of the Familists). This is the new and last Dispensation. H.N. and the Elders proclaim this Kingdom, and exhort all men to hear "That every man's Eyes might be made bright, and become cleerer and cleerer to behold with a cleere Sight of their Eyes, God's Kingdom of Heaven." (Section XII).

II42 "Our Union with God in the Spirit, is the Stone that is disallowed of Men . . . against all Sense of the Flesh, and against all them that are mynded onely upon the Outwarde." (XII, 51). This union with God H.N. refers to John 17, ". . . that they may be one in Us. . . ." (XVIII, 19).

H.N. is very verbose and obscure. Only patient reading can abstract the concrete points of his teaching from a mass of verbiage. However, we now turn to the Crying Voice of the Holy Spirit of Love (London, 1648) which contains his epistles. It is the Third which is of most interest to us. This like the other writings is wordy and cloudy and very uninspiring. It is "A groundly Instruction, wherein the difference betwixt God the Father, and his Son the Lord Iesus Christ, is declared, according to the spirituall and heavenly understanding." Note here the gnostic tone. H.N. has a great deal to say about spiritual and fleshly understanding. Then he goes on to say that one must know God and Christ "in himself." Some imagine God and Christ "without" them. God is a Spirit, a very true light, and an everlasting life; which God also is not known, seen, nor understood, but in his own Spirit, and in his true Light, and godly Being. "God is a very true Light, that no darkness do know or behold, and is not to be known or beheld but in his light" by those who "doe behold the same in their Spirit, as a pattern of God. . . ."

> And the Spirit of those same obedient humble ones, is the spirit that giveth respect too the serviceable testimonies of the holy Spirit of Love, to the end to be incorporated to the like-beeing of God (namely the brightness of the cleerness of the godly beeing, the

II43 upright Righteousness and holiness that God esteemeth) and then to know God the Father and his Son Jesu Christ rightly and according to the Truth, and to understand the secretness of the Kingdom of God and Christ. (p.25)

After this somewhat incondite passage we come to Chapter III which discourses of Adam. This contains H.N.'s doctrine of Man, and is an important section for us.

> When the Almighty God . . . had finished heaven and earth . . . then did he also create him a man, according to the likeness of his Godhead, who should carry or beare the very like being of God, and the Image of his glory, as a fellow partaker of, or being like unto, the godly nature and kind. Through which like beeing of God, God would be known everlastingly in the man, as a true God. Herethrough was God in the Beginning as a light of life, of one substance with the manly creatures, God brought forth the memory, for a good and holy understanding, because that his like-beeing should not be alone in the manly creatures, but that the memory should in all good and holy understanding, be an help or aid to the like-beeing of the Godhead in the manly creatures, to all peace and concord and to all Love and welfare upon earth.

Before proceeding further, it will be as well to remark that here we can see that the narrow divide between immanentalism and pantheism has been crossed, for God is "of one substance with the manly creatures." It is plain that the importance of the historical manifestation of Christ has been much diminished, for, in orthodox Christian doctrine, he alone is incarnate God who alone reconciles the world to God by the Union in his divine-human Nature, and by the moral value of his divine-human work.

According to H.N., Christ flows or is born out of the Godhead, incorruptible, the "only born Son of God, and a very true light, and eternall life for evermore like unto his Father." But man has turned from this and has "born the

II44 contrary being to God, that Antichrist, the like-being of the devill. . . ."

Apparently the divine substance which man shares with Christ is capable also of bearing the Image of Antichrist! This, of course, is to be expected where the underlying metaphysic is monistic. It is possible to see here the source of the Familistic doctrine (which was held in common with the Jorists and owned later by the Ranters) that heaven and hell are now, in this present. They are subjective qualities. One does not see evidence for this teaching in Sebastian Franck but one wonders whether he too believed this: it follows logically from a monistic viewpoint.

But to conclude our quotations from H.N. here is a paragraph from the conclusion of the Third Epistle:

> These publishers of the holy Word or Gospel of the Kingdome of God (seeing now that Jesus Christ had a shape in them, as a very true light and life of God, and that God's shape was in Christ, wher-thorough they likewise were in Christ, and God in them) have published that word (Grace and Peace from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ) in the truth.

Actually, H.N. was not very consistent in metaphysical terms. This is not surprising, because his statement of religion derives from his religious experience in toto and is not structured consciously upon a philosophically contrived basis. One can never expect religion always to manifest theoretical consistency since that is not its aim, and inward religion is content to find its origin, its being, and its goals in mystery. Experience is by its very nature none self-explanatory; it is only self-revealing. Experience

II45 consists of happenings: its nature is immediacy. H.N. sees the divine Nature both as the ground of being, and as the object of experience. It is both something that we are, and something that we become. On the one hand he is immanentalist to the point of pantheism, and on the other he finds room for spiritual infusion. Here is an echo of St. Augustine's dictum, "Become what you are." This is not accidental for, as has been already implied, there is reason to suspect a continuous neo-Platonist tradition in the nether-realms of mystical, and mystically influenced, Christian thought. Evidence of this influence, however, does not imply that any particular writer has developed philosophical interests or that he understands the full teaching or implications of the doctrines which he promulgates. It may well be that he is completely unaware of the source of the idea which he has or even that the idea is not his own.

In addition to the metaphysical aspect of H.N.'s teaching there is the ethical. His teaching of the spiritual journey is strongly inward and quietistic. At the end of every six days the pilgrim would reach an "inn" to be instructed by a mystical host and hostess on the seventh day. At the end of the second week the land "Discipline" was reached, and the host and hostess were respectively "Love of doing God's Will" and "Willing Obedience." The third week, of contention with fleshly lusts, brought him to the land "Abstinentia" where he was to learn to conquer these desires, etc. Nothing is said about action, and about the practical ethic of the

II46 Christian life. Nothing is said, either, of living Christ's Passion with him. This seems to have lessened in importance in the course of H.N.'s life, as his religion has become more and more inward. The object of this pilgrimage consists in the human *imago dei* becoming a perfect image by a mystical transformation, when the outer conforms again to the inner. "Rebirth" lies in making this transformation. The pilgrim is Adam again.

"Adam" and "Christ" in H.N.'s writing seem to be equivalent. By being restored to true human nature the pilgrim is restored to consistency with his inward nature. This nature is a divine-human expression which is not actually a union of divine and human, but an expression of divinity in human terms. The theory is monophysite.[1] This effectively disposes of traditional Christian eschatology.

It may be asked, how can a neo-Platonic-type God fit into Christian thought? The answer lies in the super-addition of the Suffering Christ. Without this, neo-Platonism can lead only to an apathetic quietism. And, in fact, as we see, and shall see again, as quietism becomes more and more passive, the Figure of the Crucified disappears.

---

[1] On the other hand, this may have something in common with Paul of Samosata's "Adoptionism" (shared by Theodore of Mopsuestia). By placing Christ on the level of man, man was placed on the level of Christ. If Christ could enter into divinity, so could any man. (Cf. Runciman, *op.cit.*, p. 20). Cf. Hooker, "Introduction," to his *Ecclesiastical Polity* (1593). "When they the "Family of Love" have it once in their heads that Christ doth not signify any one person, but a quality whereof many are partakers; that to be "raised" is nothing else but to be regenerated or endued with the said quality;

II47 How, then, shall we describe H.N.'s spirituality? If we describe him as a type of enthusiast it is because, on balance, that is what he is. More than ecstatic pneumatic, however, he represents "spiritual religion," and stands on the left-wing of that movement, near to pantheism; he is nearer to "God or Nature" than to "God and Nature." It is easy to understand that such a perilously balanced spirituality might well give birth to positive pantheistic progeny involving crude notions of H.N.'s notion of "godded men."

This is how Familist doctrine is described by Ephraim Pagitt in his Heresiography (1661), concerning their illuminated Elders and Family:

> All illuminated Elders are godded with God, or deified; and God with them hominified, or become man.
> The young disciples are Adams, and the illuminated Elders Christs.
> The Eldest Father of the Family is Christ himself.
> All others are in a state of falsity; they are Antichrist, wicked Spirit, the devill himself.
> The Family of Love is perfect and has no need for forgiveness.
> The Illuminated Elders do not sin. . . .[1]

And as a final plum he says that Familists believed that the Angels Raphael and Gabriel (he seems to have put them down a category) were born of a woman. If this is so, it is an interesting development of a doctrine which "confuses the Substance."

---

and that when separation of them which have it from them which have it not is here made, this is "judgment" how plainly do they imagine that the Scripture everywhere speaketh in favor of that sect."

[1] E. Pagitt, op. cit., p. 110.

II48 The possibilities for megalomania in Familist doctrine, especially for gross spirits and sluggish minds, seem limitless. The divinization of man sets him above and beyond law. Some sort of antinomianism is directly indicated by such teaching and is bound to follow in the realm of expression. This teaching is not even inspirationist in its true sense, as we have seen. Familists who make their journey become as Adam was: they return to the pristine state of innocence. This innocence is impeccable because Adam is an essential expression of deity.

Allen C. Thomas[1] attempts to maintain in his article on the Familists that by the term "godded" H.N. meant "to be filled with the Spirit of God, to be regenerate," and he quotes two phrases as evidence: "There was much false doctrine through the unregenerated or ungodded men"; "the renewed or godded man." However, a mere glance at the text of H.N.'s Third Epistle before quoted is enough to dismiss this claim. Thomas does what he accuses others of doing, that is, arguing from selected texts and ignoring the inconvenient ones. It has to be said that Thomas must be read with caution since he is an "interested party." He admits in his article that Familism had a powerful influence on the Quakers, of which he is, and this article is a spirited attempt, and a partisan attempt, to rehabilitate their memory.

---

[1] A.C. Thomas, op. cit., p. 27.

II49 In the face of widespread charges against the Familists concerning immorality[1] Thomas comes to their defence: he finds no evidence for such in H.N.'s writings. However, he confuses H.N.'s teaching with Familist practice. It is indeed possible to show, with great ease, that H.N. upheld the Christian moral life, but one cannot argue from this that Familists did not interpret H.N.'s antinomianism in a crude and immoral way. We know that Anabaptism--the spring of the Familists--provides a history of immoral antinomianism, and the history of the church shows that such an inclination is deeply rooted in human nature.

Actually, it seems that antinomianism as such--the term is unfortunately pejorative--need not be morally disastrous. We should distinguish between those who believe themselves to be rooted in Grace, and to *need* no law, for whom the Law is "dead letter," and those whom we might call "ranting antinomians," such as "divine men" who are *above* the Law, and who feel that they may transgress it freely. There is all the difference in the world between these attitudes. But human nature being what it is, the one will not

---

[1] *Ibid*., p. 28. Fuller, *Church History*, Cent. XVII, 18, p. 228, Nichol's (ed). (London, 1868); Neal, *History of the Puritans*, i, Chapter V, p. 227 (London, 1754); Jer. Collier, *Eccles. History of Great Britain* (London, 1840), vi. 609, vii, 311; T.V. Short, *History Church of England* (Oxford, 1832), ii, 619; G.G. Perry, *History Church of England* (London, 1862), ii, 194; Masson, *Life of Milton*, iii, 152; Alexander Ross, *Pansebeia* (London, 1664), 365; Samuel Rutherford, *Survey* (London, 1648), 267; Henry More, *Enthusiasmus Triumphatus* (London, 1662), Sec. xl; R. Baxter, *Rel. Bax*. (London, 1696), i, Part I, pp. 76 and 91; Richard Bancroft, *Survey* (London, 1593).

II50 infrequently lead to the other. However, one may certainly designate H.N. an antinomian without implying that he was an immoral man.

Among the many who testify to the existence of "ranting antinomians" among the Familists we have noted Samuel Rutherford and Richard Baxter writing in 1648 and 1698, respectively. Henry More, another good mind, has also been cited. These are but a few of the many who have so testified.

It seems, therefore, that Whiting's comments on "Ranter Familists" are not without foundation but his description of them as not "true" Familists contains the judgment that they did not follow H.N.'s teachings. This may be so but any assumption that they did not belong nevertheless to an authentic Familist group or groups would be without foundation.

We have no evidence that Familists, like Ranters, quoted holy Scripture in justification of antinomian conduct. We can but note that Scripture would hardly prove a hindrance to them since it was but "paper and ink" and could be interpreted according to their own insight. H.N.'s views are expressed in the following: "The Bible is not the Word of God, but a signification thereof, and the Bible is but ink and paper, but the Word is spirit and life."[1]

It is interesting that the Familist texts are extraordinarily dry. They do not at all breathe inward religion:

---

[1] W. Wilkinson, A Confutation of Certain articles delivered unto the Family of Love (1579).

they are pallid and uninspired. H.N. seems to have been fascinated with words like many other writers of his time and in the succeeding century. Some were inspired sufficiently to write beautifully, movingly, and even poetically. But H.N.'s fascination seems hardly akin to the intoxication--enlightened intoxication, enthused intoxication--that one meets in such a writer as, for example, Paul Hobson. Belford Bax agrees with this impression and calls H.N.'s writings "a turgid mass of theological maunderings."[1]

One of the factors involved in this is the absence of a personal, divine figure. H.N.'s spirituality is not centered on a heavenly Father, for example, or upon a unique Figure of love incarnate. His Christ is not a person but a metaphysical factor and a "quality." The diminished transcendence of God leaves little room for the inspiration of a voice from heaven, neither is there place for that upon which all the great Christian mystics have written and meditated, namely, the via dolorosa and the Crucifixion. What did "Christ" mean to H.N. and his Familists? They were "Christs" themselves. One of their contemporaries, known by the initials I.G. wrote that for Familists Jesus Christ is no more Christ-Saviour than they are that have taken in the light, and "everyone of their illuminated ones are conceived

---

[1] B. Bax, op. cit., p. 359; cf. Rufus Jones who comments in his Mysticism and Democracy, p. 130, that modern writers have complained that Anne Hutchinson's views, which Jones connects with Familism, "were a theological jargon which no man understood."

II52 of the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary . . . and all these things in a mysterie."[1] Here was nothing to stimulate him and his followers to great and moving words. In their spiritual introversion, Familists were the prisoners of their own boring limitations, aground in the shallows of their own aspirations.

But, spiritually, Familism seems to have been, in its several sectarian shapes, a varied phenomenon: it was "the mysticism of the common man--often crude and uncouth as well as plain and uncultured";[2] it was also capable of being developed into a productive cultus by one with sufficient spiritual effervescence, such as, for example, Roger Brierly at Grindleton. We know almost nothing of the various Familist sects,[3] but one finds it hard to believe that there were ever as many as implied by the range and frequency of the term in contemporary polemics. One is rather forced to believe that the term "Familism" came to designate a point of view as much as the specific sect-constellation. Bodies

---

[1] I., G., *Truths Victory Against Heresie* (London, 1645).

[2] R. Jones, *Mysticism and Democracy*, p. 121.

[3] Yet we may note here E. Pagitt's comments on the "Castalian Familists," *Heresiography*, p. 110: "Who tearm themselves Eagles, Angels, and Archangels, Lambs and Doves, etc., who hope in a short time to be inspired with as great a light and illumination as ever Paul or any of the prophets were, which all allegorize the places of Scripture concerning Christ, denying indeed that there was ever such a man as Christ, dreaming only of a sanctifying Christ, and abhorring a justifying Saviour, expecting salvation by their own works, although they be known to be corrupt workers. . . ." Cf. *State Papers Domestic Charles I*, Vol. CCCXIV, No. 34, February 20, 1636, and Vol. XX, No. 85, 1649.

II53 which took an extreme inward view of religion, who insisted on spiritual rebirth rather than a fictional justification, who placed the Spirit before the Word, who spiritualized eschatology, who tended to antinomianism, and to doctrines of free-will and Pelagianism, were popularly called "Familist."

If this is so, it serves to indicate the wide range of Familist influence. The Familist point of view was very attractive to many, powerfully expressing, as it did, a prevailing mood among ordinary folk,[1] an inclination to search out their own mysteries in their own way. We see here one facet of the common revolt against the church in either Traditional or Reformed guise; against potestas as such. The movement, of which Familism was one symptom among many, was a movement towards democracy in matters of religion, and was the expression of a desire on the part of the common folk to discover and acknowledge their own auctoritas.

That is the positive side. The negative side, however, can be seen in the appeal of quietist religion. Anabaptism contained both active and quietist strains. The active wanted to reconstruct the social order and to rebuild the

---

[1] R. Jones, Mysticism and Democracy, p. 126. Jones says that Familists in England were "weavers, basket-makers, musicians, bottle-makers, and other laborers who travelled at their trades and so disseminated their faith and their way of life." However, it is interesting to note that Samuel Rutherford in his Survey (1648), pp. 343, 346-349, says, "It is not like but that Queen Elizabeth heard of these books and saw them, since many of her and King Iames his Court favoured them." "Divers of the Court of Queen Elizabeth and of K. Iames and some nobles were Familists."

II54 world. But the quietist strain was a retreat from the world and its harsh realities. It was, in its nature, defeatist. Familism was of this sort. Its organization and purpose were inwardly directed, and remained unbalanced by outward and worldly purpose. Familists were not even millenarians in any historical sense. These passive and defeatist characteristics we shall meet again in the Ranters. Says Allen, introducing the Familists, "Few religious bodies have attracted more attention during so brief an existence and few have dropped so quickly out of notice as the Familists." While its ideas were attractive and spread, being capable of adaptation, as a sect, Familism proved too weak to long survive. Its weakness lay in its extreme inwardness. Few men have the substantial inner strength and vision that an authentic inward religion demands. If the notion of "goddedness" signifies anything, it is not something to which many people would come. Instead, one would expect to find people making up in their imagination what they failed to possess in fact. They would mouth the words but be devoid of their meaning. Spiritual destitution could be never far away. What happened to David Joris or to Henry Nicholas happens to few. Such experience can be verbalized but not conveyed. It can be communicated only in spirit. If externalized in words and forms, these can only be imitated and adopted, but the experience itself must remain personal and secret. Is this not the story of religion--first the vision, and then the degeneration?

II55 In conclusion, we shall turn to John Etherington's astonishingly acute observations on the Familists made in 1645.[1]

Etherington's contacts with Familists seem to have been particularly by way of the preaching of the Familist Giles Randall. Etherington was impressed by Randall's teaching that a man baptized with the Holy Ghost knew all things, "which himself greatly admired as a deep mystery and likened it to the great ocean where there is no casting Anchor, nor sounding the bottom." Elsewhere Etherington sums up their teachings as we have met them and says:

> This being their very doctrine . . . it necessarily followeth, that they who are fully possest with the belief thereof, neither have nor can have the least hope or expectation of any other coming of Christ hereafter, of a perfection, of a resurrection of the body, of an eternall life, salvation, glory, rest, peace, paradise, city, kingdome to come.
>
> And the case being so, that their hope and happinesse is only here in this their new and last day, as they speak, then it is best for them to rejoyce and be glad while their day lasteth, and deck themselves here with Rose buds before they be withered . . . for tomorrow they shall die, and all will be past.

Etherington points out that all their joys are reduced to carnal ones, and that any man whose life is full of carnal delights is as happy as they. Then he adds: "Besides, if there be no other resurrection nor salvation then what is now presently, as H.N. saith, then what condemnation is there other, then what is also now presently; and so when the body dieth, condemnation endeth."

---

[1] J. Etherington, A Brief Discovery (London, 1645), pp. 9-10.

II56 These are penetrating observations. Sorrow and guilt, frustration and condemnation are as much part of life as joy and satisfaction, success and reward. The latter is ever tempered by the former: no joy is unalloyed. And there remained for the Familists, therefore, no hope, no promise, of perfect joy and untarnished reward. The Familists' expedient in this somewhat bleak situation was to endeavor to regard their life as perfect and themselves as impeccable individuals. However, this is easier held as a doctrine than believed and accepted in the heart. Etherington obviously felt that Familists, in common with all other men, knew "the sorrow of this world which worketh death."

It seems unlikely that anyone living in England in the mid-seventeenth century could escape the message of the Puritan preachers concerning sin and the fallen state of man. The Familists' doctrine of impeccability must have required an heroic struggle to maintain in the face of such, and such constant pressure. There is reason to believe that the Familists' spiritual cousins, the Ranters, were deeply afflicted by a sense of guilt for denied sin. This is a very destructive thing. Robert Burton who, like Shakespeare, was greatly interested in the gnawings of guilt in the human soul, wrote the following words which may be apt here:

> For those who live in sin, at length shall find / Guilt's angry hand press heavy on the mind: / Though bribes or favour may assert their cause,/ Pronounce them guiltless, and elude the laws,/They're self-condemned; their own impartial thought/Will damn, and conscience will record the fault.[1]

---

[1] R. Burton, *Anatomy of Melancholy* (London, 1621). This quotation is taken from the edition of 1801 by Messrs. Vernor, Hood, and others (London), p. 383.

1157 Such may have been the case with Familists as it was with the Ranters. We shall explore this theme at greater length in our concluding chapter.

In the latter chapters we shall not attempt to show that the "intimate connection" between Familists and Ranters indicates that Ranters were a Familist sect but we shall see that Ranters exemplify in a high degree the development of Familist ideas, modified by other influences which we shall begin to consider in the next chapter. For we must now turn our attention to the ancient university town of Cambridge where noble men were thinking lofty thoughts, their backs for the most part also turned on the actual world, and their unflinching gaze directed toward the inner reality and the glory of the One.

II58

APPENDIX TO CHAPTER II

In his book, The Pursuit of the Millennium[1] Norman Cohn has included an Appendix in which he maintains that the Ranters were the English manifestation of the Brethren of the Free Spirit who are the main subject of his impressive book. He points out the similarities of belief and conduct in the two groups. Mainly he is impressed by the elements of self-deification, antinomian, anarchic eroticism, the denunciation of the institution of private property, and a primitive communism.

The grounds of Cohn's thesis seem to be somewhat tenuous. Virtually no documents belonging to the Brethren have survived and Cohn is happy to hail the writings of the arch-Ranters as supplying the deficiency!

It must be pointed out that whereas (if Cohn's account of the Brethren is reliable) the element of communism and the denunciation of private property were central doctrines among the Brethren, among the Ranters they appear to have been of only minor importance. Abiezer Coppe denounces the "cankered gold" of the rich in a truly prophetic manner, and

---

[1] Norman Cohn, The Pursuit of the Millennium (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1961). The first edition was in 1957. See p. 151 f. and pp. 321-378.

II59 Laurence Clarkson, an embittered man down on his luck, denounces private property. The latter can hardly be seen as a revolutionary social doctrine. And Coppe's diatribe against "cankered gold" seems to have been the result of agony for the poor, as we shall notice in its place. The practice of self-deification, together with that of communism, can both be traced to Familism, as we have seen, and anarchic eroticism can as easily be traced to Anabaptism--the background of Familism. Finally, we may here observe that whereas the Brethren eagerly awaited the End and the Messianic Kingdom, nothing was further away from the minds of the Ranters. Mainly pantheistic in doctrine, they expected no End and could hope for no Chiliastic era.

Barclay, in his famous book on the religious societies of the Commonwealth[1] had noticed the same similarities. Cohn makes no mention of this and has nothing new to add, least of all in evidence for the connection which he claims existed. Barclay says specifically that, "We have entirely failed in tracing the continued existence of these . . . 'Brethren of the Free Spirit', in distinct societies between this period (the sixteenth century) and 1640." Cohn cannot remedy the deficiency.

A much stronger case can be made for Ranter dependency on Familism the presence of which in England is at least an

---

[1] See R. Barclay, The Inner Life of the Religious Societies of the Commonwealth (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1876), pp. 414-416.

II60 established fact, though, even here, no actual proof exists of organic connection. The most that can be said with any certainty is that certain constellations of ideas appear and reappear in the Spiritual movements of the late Middle Ages and on, and origination cannot be ascribed to any particular group or groups. Antinomian ideas of some sort appear in the very first Christian century, as does the idea of the deification of the believer. At what precise historical moment the two ideas of deification and antinomianism were linked together, none can say. Even if it could be demonstrated that Ranter ideas were directly derived from the Brethren or from the Familists, this still would be no explanation of *why* these ideas were appealing to a group of people in England in the sixteen forties, and why they were preferred to the traditional Christian *Weltanschauung*. A contribution to an understanding of this appeal is an aim of this dissertation.

BIBLIOGRAPHY OF SIXTEENTH AND SEVENTEENTH CENTURY WORKS

CONSULTED FOR CHAPTER II

Anon. *A Supplication of the Family of Love* (1606).

Anon. *A Brief Discovery of the Blasphemous Doctrine of Familism* (London, 1645), attributed to Jno. Etherington.

Anon. *An Apology for the Service of Love* (London, 1656).

Basel (Governor of the University of the Citie of). *David Gorge . . . a very Blasphemer* (1650), tr. from the Latin.

Denison, Stephen. *The White Wolfe* (London, 1627).

Etherington, John. *A Brief Discovery* (London, 1645).

Helmes, Jno. *The Familie of Love*; Acted by the children of his Maiesties Revells (London, 1608).

I., G. *Truths Victory against Heresie* (London, 1645).

Knewstub, I. *A Confutation of monstrous and horrible heresies taught by H.N.* (London, 1579).

N., H. *The Principall Epistles if H.N. which he hath set forth through the holy Spirit of Love* (Amsterdam?, 1575?).

N., H. *An Introduction to the Holy Understanding of the Glasse of Righteousness* (Amsterdam?, 1575?).

N., H. *A Crying Voice of the Holy Spirit of Love* (London, 1648).

Pagitt, E. *Heresiography* (ed. of 1661).

Rodgers, Jno. *The displaying of an horrible secte of grosse and wicked heretiques nameing themselves the Family of Love* (1578).

Snow, Susanna. *A Description of the Sect called the Familie of Love* (London, 1641).

Tobias. *Mirabilia opera Dei*: Certaine wonderfull Works of God which hapned to H.N. (Amsterdam?, 1575?).

III1

CHAPTER III

PLATONISTS AND PURITANS

Introduction

It is our purpose in this chapter to evoke some of the features of the intellectual landscape to be seen at the mid-flight of the seventeenth century in England and to discourse in particular upon Platonism which was not unimportant in the development of that state of mind which produced Ranterism.

In the first part we shall consider Dr. John Everard who was closely connected with Seekerism and who seems to have had an effect upon some of the Cambridge Platonists. Everard stands for the most prominent features of "inward religion," and his preaching (and possibly some of his writing), seems to have been well known to at least one arch-Ranter, namely, Jacob Bauthumley. In addition, as we shall notice in the chapter on Joseph Salmon, there is reason to look upon at least some Ranters as close to the authentic Seeker mainstream.

In the second part of the chapter we shall discuss the Cambridge Platonists in a rather general way and seek out those elements in their teaching which seem to bear most directly upon Ranterism.

III2 Interrupting this discussion we shall, in part three, briefly mention some concurrent themes, notably the impact of the "New Philosophy," and the contrary streams of pessimism and optimism which resulted from it.

In part four, we shall look closely at one of the lesser-known of the Cambridge Platonists, Peter Sterry, and we shall draw attention to the soul-sickness and melancholy which accompanied his Platonistic thought.

Hence: Part I: John Everard
Part II: Platonists at Cambridge
Part III: New Philosophy
Part IV: Peter Sterry

* * * * *

In our study of the Familists we considered a movement embodying a spirituality typical of the introverted quietism found in yet other sects owing their origin to Anabaptism. Such are the Mennonites, the Swiss Brethren, and the Hutterites. The doctrine of indwelling divinity important to that spirituality is really a form of Thomas Münzer's doctrine of the Inner Light of which the Ranters were heirs as are the Quakers. The source of Münzer's doctrine cannot be exactly traced but Joachim di Fiore was certainly an important influence. Joachim's trinitarian division of history was a popular one throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and provided a theoretical structure favoring those who wished to believe that the Age of the Spirit had come in which the dreams of old men and the visions of young would

III3 illumine the entry into the Kingdom of God. Since one who had the Light within had no need of Church, Ministry, or Sacrament, and since the advent of the Kingdom meant that God would "overturn, overturn, overturn," the doctrine was plainly both antinomian and dangerous. It led finally to Münzer's execution.[1] The antinomianism inherent in the doctrine of the Inner Light, however, is not necessarily a violent one but, as in the Mennonites and Quakers, might tend to quietistic doctrines or to a quiet leavening expressed in social agitation as in Winstanley and the Diggers. This quiet experience and teaching of interior illumination agreed well both with popular mystical traditions and with the temperament of mystically inclined people, whether of high or low degree. This meant that there was always a potential confluence of the enthusiastic and "spirit-filled" traditions with the illuminist mystical traditions springing from the copious fount of neo-Platonism. In the history of spiritual sects it is often hard to distinguish which element is dominant.

Where enthusiasm displays a clear tendency to despise the intellect or "fleshly wisdom," the mystical traditions are confused. Whereas on the one hand, true to their neo-Platonistic inspiration,the latter tend to glorify the intellect as divine, on the other hand it is seen as an

---

[1] Cp. Norman Cohn, The Pursuit of the Millennium (New York, 1957). This book is in large part a history of this doctrine.

III4 insufficient means to experiential knowledge of God. Intellect must be surpassed by illuminated reason--a faculty which is intuitive rather than logical. This point of view is expressed in early years of seventeenth-century England by John Everard, and in the middle years by the Cambridge Platonists. Whereas it is true that their social stratum was far removed from the sects (saving the Seekers), and their intellectual distance as great, we must not underestimate their importance, first, as examples of a religious climate existing not only in the sects but at a high level of intellect and culture, and secondly, as influencing the progress of their type of thought in the community at large. For they were heard in the pulpit, and they appeared in print, and both means of publication were speedy and powerful.

We should consider, however, that the opinions held in high places may have had erratic and perhaps perverse effects upon the simple uneducated and semi-educated folk who made up the sects. Religious unorthodoxy, doubts, and subjectivism on high were likely to engender potent reactions below especially because ordinary folk were not able to appreciate a position in full or to incorporate, with the higher mind, the reservations and balanced factors relevant to an opinion. Thus, for example, while in noble university circles spiritual illumination included and went beyond reason, and therefore balanced rapture with wisdom, among the sects the illumination was a substitute for reason, and ecstasy could pass into madness. That such madness must be

III5 divine was asserted by some but scornfully derided by others.

It would therefore be inaccurate and unfair to say that the university men set ordinary reason at naught. They were firm believers in the rational order of things. John Donne's words were surely pleasing to them even if they would have added something more to them:

> All the way, O my God . . . Thou hast proceeded openly, intelligibly, manifestly by the book. From thy first book, the book of Life . . . from Thy second book, the book of Nature . . . from Thy third book, the Scriptures, where Thou hast written all in the Old, and then lightest us a candle to read it by, in the New Testament. . . .[1]

The "candle to read it by," they would have added, is the "spirit of man" for "the spirit of man is a candle of the Lord," words of which Benjamin Whichcote, for example, was very fond. Illuminated reason is a faculty of the spirit-illuminated man but it is a notion which is intensely subjective.

Let us now turn to Everard, and then to the Cambridge Platonists, taking a look as we proceed at this and yet other factors in their spiritual and intellectual environment which are of particular interest to us.

John Everard[2]

"Many of Ranting Everard's party are lunatick, and

---

[1] Devotions on Emergent Occasions, J. Sparrow, editor, 1923, p. 52,9. Expostulations; quoted by G. Huehns, Antinomianism in English History (London: Cresset Press, 1951), p. 46.

[2] John Everard, born c. 1575; Clare College, Cambridge, M.A., 1607; D.D., 1619; Preacher at St. Martin's in the Fields, etc. The date of his death is unknown.

IVI6 exceedingly distracted. . . ." These words from the Ranters Recantation (1650) direct our attention to the interesting figure of John Everard who was frequently responsible for disturbing the Establishment and who was as frequently imprisoned for it. "What is this Doctor Everout? His name shall be Doctor Neverout," said King James who was something of a wit.[1] His crimes were both political and religious. Daringly he opposed the Spanish Marriage, holding it a sin to match with idolators, and in 1639 he was convicted of familism, antinomianism, and anabaptism, being fined a thousand pounds.[2] Haller explains that this accusation does not mean that Everard was necessarily a follower of either John Smyth or H.N. but that "the man had been swept by Puritan individualism into such exaltation of the individual soul as more than one enthusiastic idealist or mystic before him had expressed."[3] This might indeed be so but we know that he was closely in contact with the undercurrents of English spiritual life merely by taking note of his teachings. Rufus Jones associates him with the sects on this basis. Speaking

---

[1] Quoted by Wm. Haller, The Rise of Puritanism (New York: Columbia University Press, 1938), p. 208.

[2] This information is given by Rapha Harford in his Dedicatory Epistle to Everard's collected sermons published as Some Gospel Treasures Opened (London, 1653), and re-issued as The Gospel Treasury Opened (London, 1657). The quotations in this chapter are taken from this latter version abbreviated as Gosp. Treas.

[3] Haller, op. cit., p. 208.

III7 of that loose association of free-doubters, the Seekers, Jones says, "He is, I feel sure, the father of the movement."[1]

One of Everard's close associates was the well-known London Familist Giles Randall.[2] He published Everard's translations of the Theologia Germanica in 1648 (in circulation in MS by 1628), and possibly of others such as The Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil by Sebastian Franck, The Vision of God by Nicholas of Cusa (1646), and selections from Hermes Trismegistus, Dionysius the Areopagite, Denck and Tauler. Everard's theological and mystical leanings are clearly designated by these works, and one is not surprised to find him consorting with a well-known Familist. Whether he was deserving of the appellation "Ranting Everard" must remain open to doubt. In teaching he may have had something in common with the arch-Ranter Jacob Bauthumley (as Sippell holds) and also with Jo. Salmon, another quietistic immanentalist also an arch-Ranter, but it seems very doubtful that he ever shared the views and emotions of the activist antinomians Clarkson and Coppe. Rapha Harford who wrote the Epistle Dedicatory to Everard's collected Sermons[3] says that Everard

---

[1] R. Jones, Mysticism and Democracy in the English Commonwealth (Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1932), p. 77.

[2] For a brief account of Giles Randall, see R. Jones, Spiritual Reformers in the 16th and 17th Centuries (London: Macmillan, 1914), pp. 253-263. He was acquainted with L. Clarkson and it seems likely with A. Coppe also. Both men were arch-Ranters.

[3] Everard, Gosp. Treas.

III8 clearly "distinguished the outward and killing letter from the Life and Spirit of the Holy Word," but was not an antinomian or a sympathizer with Ranterism: "He cuts his way clear between the meer Rationalist who will square out God according to his reason, and the Familist who lives above all ordinances, and by degrees hath turned licentious Ranter." Harford, however, is a great admirer of Everard and it is difficult to believe that his eulogies are a balanced account of his life and work.

Haller believes that Everard was an important agent in the development of that mystical enthusiasm in the decade before 1640 which "was to flourish so abundantly and so much more extravagantly a little later."[1]

Information about Everard is scanty since the main source is Rapha Harford's essay which has been already mentioned, so we are left to speculate why he should have been labelled with the verbal-adjective "ranting." He may have been so-called because he was constantly in trouble with authority; he may have had more to do with known Ranters than surviving evidence indicates; his teaching may have contained elements which were known to exist in Ranter teaching also--either directly or in some version.

Everard, as we have already noted, was a Cambridge man, and Cambridge was a fertile field for theological and

---

[1] Haller, *op. cit.*, p. 208.

III9 philosophical thought during a large part of the seventeenth century. Not only was it a bastion of Puritanism but it also provided a home and nurture for the famed Cambridge Platonists of whom Benjamin Whichcote was the first. He appeared on the scene in 1628, entering Emmanuel College; this was some nineteen years after Everard took his Doctorate in Divinity. Everard was thus in the most active phase of his association with the university before Whichcote arrived. There are features of Everard's teaching, however, which remind one of that of the Platonists, and one must wonder whether he exercised any direct influence on them. He was only about forty-four years of age when Whichcote went up, and it is to be expected that as a Cambridge D.D. in middle life he was often at the university, dining at some high-table, conversing and arguing with the dons. His sermons display the "imaginative mind glowing at the thought of the divine presence in man and nature"[1] as we shall notice in the Platonists, and in particular, in Peter Sterry.

Everard has a strong sense of God's glory and unknowability. This theme constantly recurs in his work. This must be mentioned first since it served in an important way to complement and partly counterbalance his very strong sense of divine immanence. It saves him from losing his God in Nature.

---

[1] Ibid., p. 209.

III10

> We cannot honour him, nor dishonour him as to himself; he is far, infinitely far above our praises or dispraises; neither toucheth him . . . if he be not glorified by us in his mercy, he is and will be in his justice: He turns even evil works to his praise, even the wrath or wickedness of man shall praise him. . . .[1]

He himself brings these themes into immediate proximity elsewhere:

> Yet let me tell you, no man can see God as he is, not in his Essence; no not the Angels in heaven; they themselves are not capable of that, nor ever shall be; but then the scales of Ignorance and blindness shall fall from our eyes, and then we shall see his Influence into (sic) all Creatures, and how this infinite God Flowes into them all, as the river of Thames or the Sea, by its streams it flows into all the adjoyning Creeks and Arms, but into every one according to their capacity, and not according to their own greatness, . . . Into men, into beasts, birds, fish, into all creatures. . . .[2]

It is tempting to say that Everard is a pure monist, an idealist pantheist, but he constantly falls back on paradox in attempting to safeguard himself from this accusation, though with limited success:

> But he [God] is that by which all these [creatures] have their pleasantness, light, and sweetness; and whatever excellency any creature hath, he is not that thing (as some have foolishly conceited) because God is in them, therefore they are Gods, etc., this declares in such much ignorance and weakness. . . .[3]

It is to be noticed that Everard does not actually say that

---

[1] From the sermon, "To Me is given all Pow'r in Heaven and Earth," in Gosp. Treas., p. 451.

[2] From sermon, "The Heavenly Host" (Pt. II, pp. 17 and 18), in Gosp. Treas.

[3] Ibid., p. 25.

III11 creatures are not manifestations of the divine: he simply asserts that they are not gods. Thus he proceeds to make use of the scholastic doctrine of substance and accidents. He says that God is the Essence of all things: take away all their accidents and then what remains is God. So with men:

> . . . take from him highness and lowness . . . weight and lightness, youth and age, for all these are Accidents, and what remains then but he that was, and is, and is to come? the All in all; he that is Alpha the first of all; and shall be Omega the last of all: What remains then but the first begotten of the Father, Jesus Christ? even him that is the Ancient of Dayes, he that is above all, through all, and in all. Ephesians 4:6.[1]

Here we may note the doctrine which is also found in the Cambridge Platonists later on, that Jesus Christ is the mode of the divine indwelling in the Creation. From the point of view of orthodoxy Everard's doctrine of the Trinity is very dubious and seems to be Sabellian and Modalistic as the following extract shows:

> A Gods name praise him in a tree, praise him in the wind, and in all Creatures; for the life of every Creature, of every tree, is Christ Jesus, the Son of God, and his first begotten of all his Creatures; the power of the wind is Christ Jesus, the life of a man is Christ Jesus.[2]

Although it may be said that Everard does not lose his God in Nature, it is also plain that he cannot clearly distinguish God from Nature. Yet he does not like the implication of his teaching that men and all creatures are divine.

---

[1] Ibid., p. 27.

[2] Quoted by Haller, op. cit., p210, from Gosp. Treas., p. 293.

III12 In Everard's work, as in that of most other strong immanentalists of his day, one can see the influence of neo-Platonism. We may see it, for example, in a passage in which he points out how the beings nearest in order to God are most free of matter and imperfection, while those lower down the order of being are increasingly more material: "God is a pure Spirit, only Form without any manner of matter; and all the Creatures the further off from Him, the more matter (they have) and the nearer the less."[1] He illustrates this doctrine by describing the modes under which angelic beings of various orders may be pictured. Then he proceeds to describe the nature of man as possessing both finite and infinite attributes, utilizing Plotinus' teaching of the divine indwelling:

> The way back to this infinite Ocean from which we have come and in which we belong is through the narrow inlet of our own souls. Most of us occupy ourselves on the outcoasts and do not put back to the infinite Sea itself where we become united and made one with His Life.[2]

What, then, is the implication of this doctrine? Is it possibly not the case that all men and angels are "saved" simply by the virtue of their inward divine nature? Everard does not lose sight of the ethical quality of this question:

> . . . will you see God in a man? as he is in a good man, so he is also in an evil man; God or Christ dwells in them both, in regard of Essence, both in good and

---

[1] Everard, op. cit., p. 345.

[2] R. Jones, Spiritual Reformers, p. 249.

III13

> bad: but here is the difference, Christ lives not, is not formed in them (as to them) in the one, but in the other he is, as to them: the one sees it, and knows it, and prizeth, and rejoyceth in the seeing, and believing of it; the other doth not, but is Anathema Maranatha, and separated from Christ. I Cor. 16:22.[1]

Unlike the quasi-mystical ideas of the Familists, Everard sees that the formation of Christ in a man is a matter of character. But in the following passage his language is very much like that of the Familists:

> When thou begins to finde and know not merely that He was conceived in the womb of a virgin, but that _thou_ art that virgin and that He is more truly and spiritually, and yet as really, conceived in thy heart so that thou feelest the Babe beginning to be conceived in thee by the power of the Holy Ghost and the Most High overshadowing thee; when thou feelest Jesus Christ stirring to be born and brought forth in thee; when thou beginnest to see and feel all those mighty, powerful actions done in thee which thou readest that He did in the flesh--here is a Christ indeed, a real Christ who will do thee some good.[2]

Thus we see that the formation of Christ in a man is both ethical and mystical--though these two approaches agree together only in the vaguest sort of way--and there is no mention of a doctrine of Grace. This may be because such a doctrine is grounded in a metaphysic which stresses God's transcendence as much as his immanence. It is difficult to conceive the transmission of grace from God to God, or to picture the visitation by God to a soul that is already of divine essence. Such teaching tends to place the onus of

---

[1] Everard, _op. cit_., p. 26.

[2] Quoted from Jones, _Spiritual Reformers_, p. 244.

III14 attaining virtue upon the soul itself. It is an emphasis which is found in the Cambridge Platonists and in sects which also stress inward religion. The result is that whereas, on the one hand, a man can rejoice in the divine indwelling, on the other hand, he is bound to be confused by spiritual failure. It is easy to see that one conclusion to be drawn from this is that the Deity is indifferent to virtue and to vice. A notion of this sort is supported by the teaching that the object of God's love is God himself: the creature qua creature does not qualify. The saints, knowing that God is among them not less or less gloriously than he was in Sinai, "will upon the sight of God in any Creature fall down before him, in a holy extasie and amazement of spirit fall down and worship him."[1]

Everard's conception of those who are reprobate is that they are those who worship the creature rather than the Creator. Though God is yet within them, they neither know him nor can see him; Christ is crucified again in their hearts, and they themselves live in hell. How different is the condition of the saint! Within he may see the City of God, Heavenly Sion adorned with the rich jewels of repentance, love, joy, and hope. One who would see God must look within not without, for without is nothing but darkness, weeping, and gnashing of teeth.[2]

---

[1] My italics. Paul, Epistle to the Romans, Ch. i. Everard seems to be very conscious of the danger of worshipping the Creature rather than the Creator.

[2] Reported by Haller, op. cit., p. 211. (My paraphrase).

III15 The subjectivity of heaven and hell, a now widely distributed notion, is found not only among Familists and Ranters, but also, not unexpectedly, in Milton: "The mind is its own place, and in itself/Can make a Heav'n of Hell, a Hell of Heav'n."[1] An awareness of sin in one who believes in the divine indwelling may be met not only by the thought that Deity is indifferent to what we call evil but by the next logical thought that sin and evil have no real existence. Then, of course, there remains the possibility--if the other ideas will not suffice--that perhaps God himself is responsible for evil. The former notion, that evil has no real existence, was held in general by the Cambridge Platonists, and the latter notion, paradoxically in combination with the former, by Peter Sterry who was one of them.

It is worthy of note that subjectivist notions were to be found outside the sects as well as within them. This applied not only to ideas about heaven and hell but also to the tendency within the sects, and common also in Puritan preaching, to transform the stories in the Bible into sagas of the spiritual life.[2] Everard was not behind in this:

---

[1] Paradise Lost, Bk. I, lines 254 ff, for the most part written between 1658-1665, although it is known that Milton was working on his text in the early sixteen forties. Cp. DNB, "Milton." Cp. E. Cassirer, The Platonic Renaissance in England, tr. J.P. Pettegrove (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1953). Cassirer traces this subjectivist notion to the Cambridge Platonists and selects Whichcote as exemplar. He seems not to have realized that this was prevalent among those who earlier taught "inward religion," e.g., the Familists. Cf. W.R. Inge, Platonic Traditions in English Religious Thought (London, 1926), pp. 46ff.

[2] Haller, op. cit., p. 212.

III16

> He, however, urged this conception of scripture with special and conscious emphasis, even took the trouble to translate Sebastian Franck's Tree of Knowledge, wherein it was definitely argued that the temptation of Adam and all that followed thereupon was a picture of what happened within the individual soul. . . .[1]

But Everard, it seems, was aware to some extent of the peculiar dangers attendant upon this interiorization of the Scripture. He at least made a show of preserving the traditional Christian emphasis upon the reality of history and of the objective nature of the salvation that God-in-Christ had won for man. This was something that the Platonists following him failed to achieve. It was this type of failure, characteristic of inward religion, that victimized such people as became Ranters.

Everard in fact protested that he was ready to stake his life that "those things were Externally and Literally acted." He was not making "all the Scripture a Fable and meerly Allegorical." "Friends, bear me Record," he exclaims, those things "were All, Actually and Really done in the flesh; but yet I also say, They were To Teach us That the same things are Alwayes in doing."[2]

It could be argued, nevertheless, that the stress and weight of Everard's teaching were so much upon "experimental" religion that his counter-balancing protests were not sufficient in fact to create a balance. He says, ". . . if

---

[1] Ibid., and Everard, Gosp. Treas, Pt. I, p. 43.

[2] Everard, op. cit., Pt. I, p. 89; Cf. Haller, op. cit., p. 212.

III17 ye once know the truth experimentally after the Spirit ye will no longer make such a stir about Forms, Disciplines, and Externals as if that were the great and only Reformation."[1]

Against this, and in justice to Everard, mention must be made of his fervent preaching of the Passion of Christ. His sermons are splendid examples of magnificent oratory, of ideas marvellously articulated, and of profound emotion. With respect to the Atonement his basic teaching was ortho--dox, but it was orthodox with a difference:

> They that conceive Christ according to the short time of 33 years . . . cut short the vastness of his greatness. Yet it is very true he lived 33 years upon earth, and one only merit of his one action that he performed at that time, was sufficient to satisfie for the sins of all the world abundantly and to perfect the work of redemption, considering what person he was . . .; the sins of all God's elect, and all the punishments due were raked together in the inventory of Christ's passion. . . .
>
> See if this be not more agreeable unto the vastness of the largeness of Christ then to confine his body only to the short time of 33 years. He it is that suffers in man, he suffered in the first man, and shall suffer in the last man . . . From the time of taking his Kingdom of his Father, till the time that he shall render up the Kingdom to his Father, it is he that suffers; and he it is that is regenerate and lives in man, after his resurrection and conversion from death, he is the new man, Christ in us the hope of glory.[2]

In spite of this interiorization of Christ's Passion, its historical integrity is in no way undermined nor is its objectivity eroded. Such teaching is a clever compromise

---

[1] Quoted by Jones, Spiritual Reformers, p. 246.

[2] Sermon, "The Eternal Passion," quoted by T. Sippell, Werdendes Quäkertum (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1937), pp. 116-117.

III18 between the doctrine of the Christ immanent in Nature and traditional teaching, and it displays true Christian sentiment, interest, and optimism. Neither is it a teaching that invites its hearers to a passive response. Indeed, Everard elsewhere strives to move his listeners to tears, to urge them to share in that Passion and to know it as their own. If it be true, as Sippell avers, that the arch-Ranter Bauthumley was heavily dependent upon Everard[1] then it must be that Bauthumley was highly eclectic. As we shall see later on, Bauthumley is like the Familists in having little feeling for history--especially for Christian history--and for Christ's Work. His silence on this matter cries in the ears.

Clever compromises between doctrines that are at root irreconcilable are the work of an artist. They do not serve ordinary men but rather confuse them. Confusion must have been the lot of many who were regular listeners to Everard's teaching. It is, after all, possible but muddling to bring together the two concepts of Jesus Christ as the immanental function of the Trinity and of Jesus Christ as the suffering Savior in Jerusalem. As a general statement it may be said that to the first doctrine belong traditions which are neo-Platonistic and mystical in spirit, which tend to inward religion, and perhaps to passivity and quietism, and to the

---

[1] Sippell, _op. cit_.,p. 92.

III19 second belong the traditions which teach justification by faith and which tend to activism and good works--and to such a movement as Puritanism. A listener, subject to certain other influences, might choose the one or the other approach: he will not necessarily be prepared to battle with the paradox, or contradiction perhaps, involved in adhering to two approaches which are, practically, irreconcilable.

This immanental doctrine reflected the important trend in the religio-philosophical thought of the time which we have already noticed. It was taken up and developed by the Platonists to whom we must shortly come. But they too found it necessary to talk in Christian terms from Christian pulpits, and so we shall again see a Christian structure amenable to Christian ethical life superimposed upon a monistic base.

There remains one more important question to consider before we come to the Cambridge Platonists. What place did "reason" hold in Everard's teaching? Did he give the intellect a place in his notion of the religious mind? Did he regard reason as an intuitive motion of the inner self, having a place prior to that of reasoning? It is not easy to answer this question since Everard did not address himself directly to it. But his general position indicates that he set little store on academic learning at least. "Doctors Pleasure, Profit, Honour, Arrogance, and Reason are learned men reared in the university of Satan."[1] Argument and dispute, he says, are nothing worth. Christ in the temple, like Christ in the heart of the saint, confounds with the wisdom of the spirit alone.

---

[1] Gosp. Treas, Pt. I, pp. 67-68; Cf. Haller, op. cit., p. 211.

Such is Everard's view. It sounds like a man jaded by academic niceties and quarrels. Not that Everard's own views do not betray an academic mind at work; indeed they display a sharp and precise mind, acute and perspicacious. But the substance of his teaching, and the basis of his attitudes, is his own inner life. He seeks to convince others by wringing their hearts and by communicating his joy: "O now, let us for ever take delight under His shadow, sitting there with great delight . . . as Guiding all things, as Filling All Things, and seeing him more ourselves, then ourselves. . . ."[1]

The danger in such an attitude as Everard's is that while it opens the heart, it closes the mind, and reason, in the ordinary sense, can no longer save a man from the wild tricks of his erratic inclinations.

It was the Cambridge Platonists who endeavored to establish "reason" in a place above "reasoning" and so aided the cause of extremism at a time when cold sanity was needed by Church and State alike.

* * * * *

---

[1] Gosp. Treas., p. 64.

III21 Historically, and not only paradigmatically, Thos. Münzer represents the enthusiastic illuminist antinomianism associated with the broad Anabaptist tradition, but he represents it in its violent form. The other illuminist tradition, springing from the same general background, also antinomian but in a quietist way, is a kind seen in Familism, Ranterism, and Quakerism, etc., and which runs in easily with that popular mysticism, pantheistic in inclination, which emanates from neo-Platonism. Sects and groups--like Ranters--which are heirs of both traditions therefore embody indifferently both enthusiastic and mystical illuminism. Illuminism associated with strong immanentalism and pantheism displays a tendency towards radical inwardness and a loss of a sense of reality and importance of the external world.

The neo-Platonic doctrine of indwelling deity, practically indistinguishable from that of the Inner Light, causes problems with regard to ethical issues in "salvation" since "salvation" (from evil and death) seems to follow by nature rather than by desert. This line of thought undermines the concept of the reality of evil--a concept already weakened by subjectivist ideas about heaven and hell.

Lastly, illuminism demolishes "reason" as logical process consonant with experience of the external world, preferring to refer itself to lofty but vague notions of spiritual insight.

These features of inward religion are represented in Everard and are, in general, developed by the Cambridge Platonists.

III22 To them we shall now turn.

Platonists at Cambridge

The Cambridge Platonists struck one of the dominant notes sounding in the complex discord of mid-seventeenth century thought in England. Though small in number they were well known, and their speaking and writing produced strong reactions among their contemporaries. They found both friends and enemies: their friends among those given to mysticism and to inward religion; their enemies among those who saw in the canonization of Plato and Plotinus a threat to Christian sanctity and to the claims of the Christian faith.

These Platonists showed, in some ways, a remarkable independence of the major attitudes of mind prevailing in their day, particularly with regard to the nature of revelation and of truth.

Unlike the Presbyterians who gave an unique and privileged status to Scripture, the Platonists felt that "what Scripture does is to confirm natural truth."[1] They put their trust in reason as divine, and saw no conflict between it and faith. Scripture revealed nothing inconsistent with reason in revealing what unaided reason could not attain unto. But Scripture was not more absolute or more divine than reason:

---

[1] F.J. Powicke, The Cambridge Platonists (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1926), p. 31.

III23 God was the Fountain of both. The Platonists, in general, were not able to draw any line between the rational and the spiritual, for in their eyes, the spiritual was simply the purest and highest form of the rational. "There is nothing so intrinsically Rational as Religion is," wrote Whichcote.[1] The Platonists, then, did not see reason in man as absolutely corrupted by the Fall, and here parted from the Puritans. In reading Platonistic writings, however, one comes to see that "reason" bears a special connotation. It partakes of the nature of intuition and is not a synonym for logical process. It is related to a man's spiritual state and Henry More wrote that the *amor dei lux animae*. "The oracle of God is not to be heard but in His holy temple--that is to say, in a good and holy man, thoroughly sanctified in spirit, soul, and body."[2] This is a thoroughly Platonic but hazy designation of "reason" and could have been satisfying neither to Puritans who wished to give an unique and independent status to revelation nor to one who, like Hobbes, for example, would put his trust in the cold, crystal light of the rational process. No wonder Hobbes treated those vast volumes of divinity with supreme contempt for they "fill our libraries and the world with their noise and uproar, but wherefrom the last thing we may expect is conviction."[3]

---

[1] B. Whichcote, *Aphorisms* (J.Jeffery, ed., London, 1703), Aphs. 221, 457, and *passim*.

[2] Powicke, *op. cit*., p. 48.

[3] **Preserved Smith**, *A History of Modern Culture* (New York: Holt and Co., Inc., 1930), p. 408.

III24 When religious insights and motions are called "reason," then reason is potentially dissolved into religious enthusiasm and whim. The reasoning process itself, in being surpassed, is denigrated, and people are left at the mercy of their own whimsy and of their doubt and superstition. Such a doctrine of "reason," rooted in a doctrine of the divine nature of the soul, may thus prove highly destructive to the equilibrium of a people already robbed of the security of an authoritative Church and of a Scripture whose infallibility, as we shall notice, had already been seriously called into question. Actually, this latter situation provided important motivating force in impelling thinkers towards the notion of an inspired reason as a complementary or even alternative source of revelation and security.[1]

The Platonists were imbued with the spirit of the Renaissance and were enchanted with the Greek spirit. Rather uncritically, they made little distinction between Plato and Plotinus, ignoring the fact that the metaphysics of these two men are actually radically different, and that, whereas those of Plato are largely reconcilable with the Judeo-Christian world-view, those of Plotinus represent an outlook totally foreign to it. For Plato stands essentially for the position that Reality and Truth are transcendent of

---

[1] This doctrine of the soul and of "reason" is very ancient. Rhode traces it back to the pre-Socratics and to Empedocles in particular. Cp. Rhode, Psyche (London: Kegan and Paul, 1925), p. 384.

III25 this world, that the reality of this clime is but derivative and secondary, that our world is, in some sense, "below" the Real which is also "beyond," and that the connection between the two realms is mysterious and rather tenuous. Such a view is easily reconcilable with the Judeo-Christian doctrine of creation which similarly represents the world as a secondary and contingent reality. It must be mentioned, however, that in Plato, though not in this Judeo-Christian position, the world appears as but a shadowy reality--almost an unreality. For Jews and Christians the world enjoys its own reality though this is not absolute or final, was made for God's "pleasure," and is the scene for His purposeful creative activity: what is done in Time has an eternal significance. This is an enormously important feature of Christian belief. Any thought or teaching which tends to undermine this doctrine must have a catastrophic effect upon Christian spiritual life and ethics.[1]

As was noticed in the previous chapter, the thought of Plotinus, though it shares a deal of Plato's spirit, is monistic. Here, the transcendence of the Real is one of degree and not of kind. The presence of the Reality is less and more concentrated within the phenomenal world and beyond it, by virtue of well-defined concepts of levels of being.

---

[1] J. Tulloch, Rational Theology and Christian Philosophy in England in the Seventeenth Century (Edinburgh: Blackwood and Sons, 2nd ed., two vols., 1874), Cp. vol. ii, Chapter vi.

III26 There is no question of two realms. All that is is permeated with the divine, either to a high or to a low degree. There is no difference of substance between levels of being. This doctrine, as we have learned, provides a theoretical basis for the enstatic mystical experience of union with the divine within. It allows man to see himself as divine in his essential nature. Man is, then, divine by nature and does not achieve divine participation by Grace. But, the sensuous world is far removed from the blazing light of the One. The world is dark, and the light of its true reality, manifested in man by inspired reason, is concealed within.

Thus the Cambridge Platonists defended natural reason (though it must be said that in their thought it is of the "inspired" variety), and natural religion. These are related inasmuch as man's divinity is "realized" by his contemplation of intelligible things as distinct from sensible things. It is in his illuminated reason that man's essential divinity is most closely exhibited and by its means that divinity is attained, that is, by which man becomes what he is. Divinity must be, and can be, achieved. A man's salvation was not for the Cambridge men, as it was for the Puritans, a free gift of grace: In the words of Plotinus,

> Withdraw within yourself, and examine yourself. If you do not yet therein discover beauty, do as the artist, who cuts off, polishes, purifies until he has adorned his statue with all the marks of beauty. Remove from your soul, therefore, all that is superfluous, straighten out all that is crooked, purify and illuminate what is obscure, and do not cease perfecting your statue until the divine resplendence

III27

> of virtue shines forth upon your sight. . . . But if you try to fix on it an eye soiled by vice, an eye that is impure, or weak, so as not to be able to support the splendour of so brilliant an object, that eye will see nothing, not even if it were shown a sight easy to grasp. The organ of vision will first have to be rendered analogous and similar to the object it is to contemplate. . . .[1]

The glorification of reason is perhaps the most important element that Plotinus shared with Plato and it is interesting to note that Protestantism as seen both in Luther and in a Puritan like Richard Baxter mistrusted human reason and blamed it for the multiplication and spread of heresies.[2] On this issue Platonist and Puritan were divided.

For our purpose in coming to an understanding of Ranterism, it is important to note the encouragement by the Platonists of a shift in emphasis from transcendent God to immanent divinity, and from salvation by Grace to salvation by one's own effort: "We are lost, not by Adam's sin, but by our own; and we are saved not by Christ's historical death, but by our own obedience to the law of the Spirit of Life revealed in Him by our own death to sin."[3] Thus these scholars, in such words as these of Whichcote's, gave respectability to a principle characteristic of the sects.

---

[1] Plotinus, *The Enneads*; Cp. Ennead I, Bk. vi, Chs. 8-9.

[2] For a useful comment on Luther's attitude towards the "whore Reason," Cp. R. Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, J.W. Harvey, tr. (London: Oxford University Press, 1928), p. 104. Luther had a strong feeling for the non-rational divine nature in general. Human nature cannot cope with this and any attempt to do so is impious. Cf. B.A. Gerrish, *Grace and Reason: a study in the Theology of Luther* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962), *passim*.

[3] Whichcote, *op. cit.*, Aphorism 525 and 612.

III28 Such a stress agrees with the related one upon inwardness of religion, upon "actual righteousness" rather than upon "imputed righteousness," which we noted in H.N. in the previous chapter. Ralph Cudworth, in words strongly reminiscent of Everard, and parallel to the previously quoted passage of Plotinus, says,

> The great mystery of the Gospel doth not lie only in Christ without us . . . but the very pith and kernel of it consists in Christ inwardly formed in our hearts. Nothing is truly ours but what lives in our spirits. Salvation itself cannot save us so long as it is only without us; no more than health can cure us and make us sound when it is not within us, but somewhere at a distance from us.[1]

Inwardness is, then, a characteristic of this Platonism. In this its representatives were set over against the Puritans who saw salvation as objective fact--to be accepted, not achieved.

Whereas the latter also sought to conquer the world *in* the world, and felt that it was only *in* the world that a man could truly serve God, yet they both spurned and valued the world simultaneously.[2] But the Platonists preferred the inward activity of contemplation before that of action in the world. Like philosophy, religion "is derived not from the energy of action, but from that of pure intuition."[3]

---

[1] Cp. Powicke, *op. cit.*, p. 33.

[2] Cassirer, *op. cit.*, p. 69.

[3] *Ibid.*, p. 71.

III29 Cassirer draws attention to the interesting point that the Platonists were alienated from their time and place, scarcely touched by the spirit of modern England, the spirit of practical activity. They looked back, nostalgically, to the past, to the golden age of the Greeks.[1] In spite of the confidence and optimism which is expressed in their writing, there is a touch of pathos about these men who could not accept their world, were ill at ease with its dominant religious themes, discomforted by the spirit of the new thought, and agitated by the birth pangs of a new age. We shall be able to remark, in due course, upon the shadows of the noteworthy seventeenth-century melancholia which lie across their thoughts and blot out their luster.

This retreat from the world we noted as a characteristic of Familism. It also was dominated by a pantheism in which the inner was valued above the outer, and the unitary interior being of things above the plural, temporal, and transitory manifestations of it. Of the Cambridge School, writes Cassirer, their "philosophy of nature goes back to the dynamic pantheism of the Renaissance."[2]

It must be emphasized that the doctrine of these Platonists seems to have expressed immanentalism and panentheism more than a doctrinaire pantheism, but if pantheistic in inclination

---

[1] Ibid., p. 72ff.

[2] Ibid., p. 51.

III30 then it manifested a pantheism of the larger sort. Their writings evince a strong feeling for the divine immensity, for the bottomless abyss of Being. There is little doubt that in this feeling for transcendence coupled with divine immanence, we see the influence of Plato. Also, it might be stressed that monism and pantheism are doctrines satisfying the mind while immanence is a term designating a feeling--a response of the heart. There is no suggestion of claustrophobia or of the fatalistic pessimism which tends to be associated with pantheism, especially of the materialistic variety. Indeed, this stress on divine immanence tends generally towards joyfulness and optimism though, as we shall have to see, there _is_ also a factor, perhaps inevitable, of frustration and lamentation pertaining to men who feel themselves distant and alienated from their True Country. We see here a parallel attitude, possibly not unrelated, to that found in the sects in their longing for the golden age of the church. This seems to point to a fairly widespread feeling of disillusionment and unhappiness.

Monism is a current of thought which, as we noted earlier, streams full against the Christian world view both of being and of history. It is, in a way, a strange phenomenon to behold in England at the time when Christian thought was asserting itself in a tempestuous fashion. Actually it is not plain that the School itself realized its contradiction of Christian tradition. These men had a clear conscience and may have seen no difficulty. After all, neo-Platonism had

III32 enjoyed a fairly long history within the Christian tradition, though mostly within or in terms of mysticism. The writings of the Cambridge school are full of inconsistencies and one sees a Christian philosophy of life and history held and expressed in the same works that portray pantheistic-type naturalism. Why should this have been so? Among the possibilities is that Christianity had long harbored persons who doubted the Christian doctrine of history: certainly the Mystics' life was centered upon union with the "hereafter" now--they were not among those who were awaiting the end of Time for the fulfillment of their expectations. Pantheism, when it occurs within the Christian tradition, is beyond a shadow of doubt, a form of scepticism. It is not far removed, in fact, from atheism.

The mere occurrence of pantheism within the Christian camp indicates that all was not well. Inner doubts about the validity of the Christian world view were now manifesting themselves. Basil Willey supports this notion, and he says:

> The Cambridge Platonists are the modern analogues of the Alexandrian Fathers . . .: the Fathers came between a declining philosophy and a rising Christianity, while the seventeenth-century theologians came between a declining Christianity and a rising philosophy.[1]

In this view Willey is expressing the sentiments of the Very Reverend John Donne in his famous lines:

---

[1] B. Willey, The Seventeenth Century Background (London: Chatto and Windus, 1934), p. 120.

III32

And new Philosophy calls all in doubt,
The Element of fire is quite put out;
The sun is lost, and th'earth, and no man's wit
Can well direct him where to look for it.
And freely men confess that this world's spent,
When in the Planets and the Firmament
They seek so many new; they see that this
Is crumbled out againe to his Atomies.
'Tis all in peeces, all cohaerence gone;
All just supply, and all Relation.[1]

These splendid but melancholy words, following upon a lament on the corruption of the natural order, indicate that, at this time, the very walls of Jerusalem herself were not immune to erosion. It will be as well if we here give a little space to some aspects of the "new Philosophy" which engendered profound and unsettling doubts in minds as yet new to that questioning of traditional doctrines of Nature and Spirit which was to become the daily fare of modern man.

New Philosophy

This new thought had taken its origin in the Renaissance, owing much to Kepler and Galileo, and to such a thinker as Giordano Bruno. The shock which the astronomers had given sensitive and learned religious minds in the sixteenth century was having a profound effect in such quarters in England already in the early years of the seventeenth. This is evidenced not only by such a work as Donne's Anatomie of the

---

[1] J. Donne, An Anatomie of the World (1611); Cf. C.M. Coffin, John Donne and the New Philosophy (New York: Columbia University Press, 1937), and M. Nicolson, The Breaking of the Circle (London: Oxford University Press, revised ed., 1960).

III33 World in 1611 but also by Godfrey Goodman's The Fall of Man and the Corruption of Nature published in 1616.[1] New astronomy not only broke the traditional cosmology. It cast the earth adrift in unfathomable space and wrecked the comfortable scheme which not only cherished the Earth at its center but which located God's major interests similarly. It cast very serious doubt upon the reliability of the Biblical presentation of the nature and order of things, and upon the Bible itself as an unchallenged authority. Thus the vault of spiritual and psychological security received a blow at its very keystone. Had the new vision of the heavens ratified the ancient belief in the order and beauty of them, perhaps the shock would not have been as severe as it was. But wandering planets and other variations were revealed, and even imperfections such as spots on the sun. The corruption of the world was displayed as extending even to the celestials. "The whole creation was seen to be involved in the fitful globe of mortality."[2]

These thoughts contributed to the general unrest and uncertainty of the times. It was clear to many that the universe was in a state of decay and must shortly collapse into final ruin. "Although various explanations have been given for seventeenth century melancholy, none has considered

---

[1] For a full discussion of this latter work, see Victor Harris, All Coherence Gone (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1949).

[2] Harris, op. cit., p. 2.

III34 seriously enough the concept of the Decay of Nature. . . ."[1]

An effect of this feeling about Nature was that one had been born too late. All was declining, and there was no point in ambition. Hope was robbed of its substance. Such an insinuating and negative conviction agreed ill with the popular idea that the Millennium was or might be just around the corner. Depression has a way of imparting a hollow ring to all the promises of Religion however confidently voiced. In fact, the more heartily a conviction be proclaimed the more it may sound like whistling in the dark. Still, where can a forlorn man turn if not to God? Here and there, men who shared doubts about Religion and its promises were expressing thoughts such as are echoed by Traherne: "God is ever more near to us than we are to ourselves, so that we cannot feel our own souls without feeling Him."[2] A man who can say such things is a believer, and a believer has little use for Religion. From some such frame of mind sprang the Seekers--flotsam on a broken sea of faith and doubt.

As a sailor abandons a sinking ship, so a depressed and frightened man might abandon his world and take refuge in the Ark of Salvation. Religion promises retreat and refuge. But finding all things mutable, perishing, and passing away, and that the storms of Renaissance and Reformation had caused

---

[1] G. Williamson, "Mutability, Decay and Seventeenth Century Melancholy," (ELH II, 1935), 121-150; here p. 122.

[2] T. Traherne, Centuries of Meditation, II, 81.

III35 the Ark's timbers to shiver, a simple pilgrim might prefer to journey to the other Shore in the coracle of his own soul.

Still, some men do not give in so easily, and 1627 saw the publication of George Hakewill's An Apologie of the Power and Providence of God which was an attack upon the essentially irreligious leanings of the doctrine of decay. Hakewill admitted the reality of change in the universe but found consolation in the constancy of change. Even change was not disastrous if it could be shown to be an essential and constant element in the order of things. Unable to turn to the Bible for support, he turned instead to Philo, Ovid, and to the Timaeus of Plato.[1] These writers had great authority but, otherwise, he might have referred to Spenser--from whom he might indeed have gained the thought:

> I well consider all that ye haue say'd,
> And find that all things stedfastnes doe hate
> And changed be: yet being rightly wayd
> They are not changed from their first estate;
> But by their change their being doe dilate:
> And turning to themselves at length againe,
> Doe work their owne perfection so by fate:
> Then ouer them Change doth not rule and raigne;
> But they raigne ouer change, and doe their states
> maintaine.[2]

Thus in some places thought turned to the idea of process in the universe. This idea couples easily with that of monism, and this conception had already found expression in Bruno, burned in Rome in 1600.

---

[1] Harris, op. cit., p. 16; Williamson, op. cit., p. 128.

[2] Ed. Spenser, Faerie Queen, Bk. vii, Canto vii, verse 58 (c. 1590).

III36 Randall speaks of him as one who really felt the infinity of the universe. Once the notion of the earth as the still center of things had been removed, Bruno perceived the relativity of observation. He saw the possibility of an infinite, centerless universe, and he saw the Christian mystery of redemption pale in the light of his new observation. Further, God could not be located in any one place: he was everywhere, at once the life and soul of all things.

> "Nature is God in things." And so Bruno passed from Platonism to a mystic pantheism, feeling the pulse of God in every natural force, seeing and adoring His glory in the vast profusion of that universe that can be but His body.[1]

But this was not far from the thought that all things were made by Nature, a sentiment echoed by Ranters.

Bruno, it seems, was not depressed by the latest turn of things. His vital imagination and adventurous intellect were able to accommodate the new knowledge and to thrive on it. His zest is unbounded and his optimism unshaken. He rejoiced in the glorious mysteries of a world pervaded by the divine presence.

This reaction found its counterpart in England in Godfrey Goodman. In his work on the corruption of Nature previously mentioned, he is said to have given that doctrine its most extensive philosophical form,[2] though the doctrine itself was

---

[1] J.H. Randall, The Making of the Modern Mind (New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., rev. ed., 1940), p. 242.

[2] Harris, *op. cit*., p. 3.

was already widespread in poem and sermon. But Goodman exempts human reason from the toils of the otherwise universal corruption and decay: he exhibits the deep respect for reason inculcated by Renaissance humanism. Reason is the Light of Nature, and it is by its radiance that the corruption of the world can be discerned. Yet reason for him is a purely natural phenomenon, one that cannot aspire to spiritual understanding. True, it gives itself over to mighty works and gracious ends in the realm of learning and art, but these are only painful efforts to remedy the low estate of fallen nature: in his own words, "These night-watches and great labours in the Universities, are only undertaken to supply Nature's defects."[1]

It is possible for an inventive mind and a strong spirit to turn a liability into an asset, and this Goodman does. He sees that the purpose of the creation is to enhance God's honour: "The end of man's creation consists not in man himselfe, who undoubtedly shall taste and see corruption."[2] Corruptible man was destined to fall: the glory of God must therefore be the end of being. A belief in the decay of the world does more honor to God than does a belief in its inviolability, for it shows man his misery and returns him to religion.

---

[1] Goodman is here quoted by Harris, op. cit., p. 15.

[2] Ibid., p. 17.

III38 Goodman's optimism is unbounded: not even the experience of evil perturbs him. Our miseries we must blame upon the Devil: evil intent comes from without, "from some spirit, that is malevolent and opposite to nature and intends nothing more than the corruption of nature."

For evil, then, neither we nor God are responsible. Our free-will is not to blame, for our flesh and nature cannot initiate sin. They are good in themselves; we are, however, "capable of evill."

God's intent in the Creation, says Goodman, was according to the nature of his goodness:

> . . . to impart his owne being and attributes to the creatures: but when I find sorrowes and griefes in man, I begin to enquire, where is the originall? for in God there is no sorrow, no griefe, no maladies, no afflictions, no diseases, no death: God did not only desire to impart himselfe; whence proceeds the malignitie? were it not, that some after-corruption hath stained man's nature.

He is confident that man has not been renounced by God, and that the corrupted world has not been abandoned. Left to itself the world would quickly return to chaos and nothingness:

> So that now all things relie not on the weaknesse of their own foundation and pillars, but on the invincible strength of God's power . . . so that howsoever the production was, whether by creation, generation, alteration, etc., yet we shall not neede to doubt or feare corruption.[1]

Goodman's confidence is invincible for even the decay of things is merciful: God's goodness would not preserve a

---

[1] Harris, op. cit., pp. 18-20.

III39 corrupt and sinful world, "therefore hee suffers the world of itselfe to decline by degrees."

In the spirit of Everard, the thought that corruption is a fruit of God's justice is a theme of both Goodman and Hakewill: in the End God will allow corruption to triumph and to bring things to a close. Thus not only is it a present token of God's mercy but it is also a "future engine of justice," for Goodman believes--as St. Paul believed--that the corruption of Nature was rooted in the Fall. He believes therefore in the importance of man who is at the center of things: when he fell, all things fell. It should be noticed that this point of view is at root an optimistic one. Man is important enough to merit God's full attention. The Restoration of the natural order waits upon God's redemption of His image and likeness.

The Corruption of Nature is emotionally a supportable thesis when accompanied by a strong doctrine of divine transcendence; the traditional Christian view of God as at once Creator, Sustainer, and Judge, is a rich source of confidence and optimism. Both Hakewill and Goodman provide good examples of the potency of this doctrine in providing aid and comfort in time of need.

If, like Bruno and Kepler, they had been moved by new discovery to a total reformulation of their world outlook to a pantheism, however exalted, their state of mind might have been very different. There was, of course, an instinctive awareness of this danger in the Christian world, and so

III40 Copernicus and Galileo were firmly--even hysterically--rejected by authority. Unlike John Donne, our friend Goodwin followed this path. Had he not, one wonders what he would have done with a combination of the doctrine of the Corruption of Nature *and* some sort of pantheistic metaphysic! Such a situation is not invincible for a lively faith and a fertile imagination, and soon we shall look at Jacob Boehme who was at this time coming to grips with essentially the same problem. We may here remark that the doctrine of Nature's corruption was not new but had been part of Christian belief since St. Paul's day at least. What was new was the frame of reference within which the doctrine now regained attention, and the frame of mind in which it was received. There can be little doubt that Lutheran and Calvinist preaching which stressed both the corruption of man, and his creaturely estate--emphasizing that he was as nothing before the Sovereign Almightiness--sensitized many minds psychologically to feel the impact of this teaching coming from so prestigious a source, and which gave stunning affirmation to the ancient Christian teaching. In addition, the new belief that the earth was not in fact the center of the universe must have raised fundamental doubts in men's minds about the dignity and destiny of man, that he was a worm and in no sense the man that he had once thought himself to be.[1]

---

[1] Inge once remarked that this little piece of celestial information remained in our own day, as it always was--indigestible.

III41 Though it may be justly said that the Cambridge men were in spirit alienated from their time, they were not left untouched by the great debate which occupied the intellectual world at this period. It took place among those who, on the one hand, represented new science, new knowledge, and new philosophy as epitomized in Descartes and Hobbes, and on the other hand, those who supported the Christian claims on behalf of the divine revelation in the Bible, and of the Church's divine authority to govern the lives of men.

The Cambridge School was much affected by Descartes' rational method though it disliked his tendency to materialism. Its members much preferred the Plotinistic teaching that all things, even things inanimate, were indwelt by the divine soul. The structure of Descartes' thought exercised an *aesthetic* appeal to them, but they were not convinced by the thought itself, neither were they one with it in spirit: not mathematics for them but mysticism. Thus Hobbes, England's native empiricist, embodied all that they hated most.

These mystic theologians took an essentially optimistic view of life and destiny. Following Plato they believed in Ideal Virtues which existed independently of the Will of God and which were, if effect, prior to it. They reacted badly to the Calvinistic teaching which--through the doctrine of predestination--made God the Author of the Fall, and which elevated God's Will above the moral virtues, implying that "Justice is the will of the stronger." Just as they could not accept that God willed sin as a punishment for unfree

III42 and therefore guiltless creatures, so they could not believe that the Corruption of Nature pleased God and ministered to His Glory.

The following verses of Henry More sum up these attitudes of the Cambridge men and point clearly towards a position independent of both Calvinism and empiricism:

When nothing can to Gods own self accrew,
Who's infinitely happy; sure the end
Of this creation simply was to shew
His flowing goodnesse, which he out doth send
Not for himself; for nought can him amend;
But to his creature doth his good impart,
This infinite *Good* through all the world doth wend
To fill with heavenly blisse each willing heart,
So the free Sunne doeth 'light and 'liven every part.

With such abounding zest and vitality, More continues:

This is the measure of Gods providence,
The key of knowledge, the first fair Idee,
The eye of truth, the spring of living sense,
Whence sprout Gods secrets, the sweet mystery
Of lasting life, eternall charity.
But you O bitter men and soure of sprite!
Which brand God's name with such foul infamy
As though poor humane race he did or slight
Or curiously view to do them some despight. . . .

In the next verse we see not only a reaction to Calvinist teaching about the divine Will, but possibly also a reaction to that of Boehme who stressed a rather similar note:

Nor of well being, nor subsistency
Of our poor souls, when they do hence depart,
Can any be assur'd, if liberty
We give to such odd thoughts, that thus pervert
The laws of God, and rashly do assert
That will rules God, but *Good* rules not God's will.
What ere from right, love, equity, doth start,
For ought we know then God may act that ill,
Onely to show his might, and his free mind fulfill.

Horrified at the thought, More exclaims:

III43 O belch of hell! O horrid blasphemy!
That Heavens unblemish'd beauty thus doth stain
And brand Gods nature with such infamy:
Can *Wise*, *Juste*, *Good*, do ought that's harsh or vain?
All what he doth is for the creatures gain,
Not seeking ought from us for his content:
What is a drop unto the Ocean main?
All he intends is our accomplishment.
His being is self-full, self joy'd, self-excellent.

Cassirer comments that, "In these verses Henry More has given the fullest and most pregnant expression to that attitude towards life which prevails among the Cambridge thinkers."[1]

We noticed earlier that the Christian metaphysic which stresses the immanence and transcendence of God, with an emphasis upon the latter, provides a solid basis for an optimistic view of life. At the same time it is noticeable that a strong immanentalism serves the same end, even in the form of an idealistic pantheism. With respect to the latter we should realize that a sense of the distance and mystery of God may also be preserved, together with a sense of the infinitude of the divine Spirit. This is in extreme contrast to the case of a materialistic pantheism where all that is divine is expressed in what is. In a word, idealistic pantheism sees the world in terms of God whereas materialistic pantheism sees God in terms of the universe. In the former case it is easier to see evil as a negative state of affairs, resulting from "distance" from the fount of Deity--in terms

---

[1] H. More, *Psychathanasia*, Bk. III, canto, iv, sts. 16-22. I owe this selection to Cassirer who comments on this teaching, *op. cit.*, pp. 126-128.

III44

of lack. It is something that belongs to the "partial" nature of existent things, for plurality is the overflowing or breakdown of Unity. It is the inevitable accompaniment of existence as an individual creature, and, as on the one hand there is something "neutral" about it as "lack" and "nothing," so, on the other, there is hope of deliverance through an eventual return into Unity with the Benevolent Spirit.[1] Such doctrine need not be destructive either of real individual existence or of ethics. Certainly it is difficult, if not impossible, to hold to a doctrine of freedom of the will, but in religious thought, which moves as much in the realm of feeling as it does in that of logic, there is no problem here which cannot be consigned to the "mystery" of being, to the Providence of God which is as unsearchable as his judgements. St. Paul's summation of his own meditations is expressed in words which are as acceptable to the pantheist as to the monotheist: "For of him, and through him, and unto him, are all things."[2]

But idealistic pantheism--as we shall notice in the next and succeeding chapters--may pass over into a pantheistic materialism should an atmosphere of melancholy and pessimism prevail. Such seems to have been the case with the Ranters.

---

[1] We shall meet this specific doctrine in the teachings of the arch-Ranters J. Salmon and L. Clarkson.

[2] Paul, Romans, xi, 36.

III45 Materialistic pantheism sets bounds upon the divine Substance. Infinitude and the sense of infinite possibility are lost. All things are an expression of the divine Substance in the most concrete and determined sense. There is no possibility of belief in even a relative freedom of will, for the shadowy depths of divine infinitude are sealed over. Also no distinction can be made between good and bad: all that happens is divine and divinely caused--blessing and cursing, delight and distress, health and disease. Even wine would scarcely make a man to be of a cheerful countenance if such should be his philosophy of nature. Common ale, rather than wine, was the Ranters' futile resort in this hard case.

Peter Sterry

We proceed now to some account of Peter Sterry, Platonist and Puritan, who not only is a fair representative of the Cambridge men, but who also, as chaplain to Cromwell and therefore close to the Army, provides an actual link between the high thoughts of the university and the popular beliefs of the sects.[1]

---

[1] Sterry is not very well known: there exists one biography of him by Vivian De Sola Pinto, Peter Sterry Platonist and Puritan (London: Cambridge University Press, 1934); in addition there is an article on him in the DNB. His printed writings that survive are collected as three books and seven separate sermons all of which are listed in my Bibliography though I do not refer in my text to all of them. Pinto, op. cit., p. 223 ff. gives an account of extant materials relevant to him.

III46

> He was an Independent minister with singular religious opinions, which were very unlike those of most English dissenters and close to the doctrines of the despised sect of Quakers on the one hand and to those of the Platonists and Latitudinarians in the Church of England on the other, to say nothing of more dangerous affinities to ancient and modern heresies.[1]

Baptized in 1613, he died in 1672. He went up to Emmanuel College, Cambridge, and was a pupil of Benjamin Whichcote, with whom he enjoyed the happiest relationship, and became one of the first in the university to make public profession of his Platonism. Sterry was elected a fellow of Emmanuel in 1637, and in 1643 was chosen one of the fourteen divines of the Westminster Assembly. Later, he was thrown into the company of Milton when the latter was made Latin Secretary, and seems to have admired him.[2] Sterry was appointed chaplain to the Council of State in 1649, two weeks after the execution of the King, becoming one of Cromwell's personal chaplains when the latter assumed the office of Protector in 1650. It is well known that Cromwell was deeply attracted by mysticism and was friendly disposed towards the sects, including the despised Quakers. Yet another of Whichcote's pupils was appointed chaplain with him, "the handsome and courteous John Howe," together with a group of men of fine intellect and original opinions including the antinomian John Goodwin and Thomas, his brother.

---

[1] Pinto, op. cit., p. 5.

[2] Ibid., p. 21.

III47 Sterry's strain of religious fervor injected into the affairs of State seems to have appealed to Cromwell. Not so unusual for England at this time, Sterry's speaking and writing were frequently couched in a high poetic style, vivid and striking. But here was a rare Puritan, if such he could be called, for he could write: "The Lord Jesus hath his Concubines, his Queens, his Virgines; Saints in Remoter Forms, Saints in higher Formes, Saints unmarried to any Forme, who keep themselves single for the immediate embraces of their Love."[1]

Erotic imagery of this sort was certainly unusual at this time and place, and savors rather of works like St. Bernard's Commentary on the Song of Songs. If this quotation gives the impression of a tendency to extravagance in Sterry's utterance there are other passages of his which bear this out. He is said, for instance, to have prayed for Richard Cromwell that he should be made "the brightness of the father's glory, and the express image of his person."[2] Yet it must be remembered that Sterry, as the other Platonists, believed that the human soul was "an Image of God" to which Sterry adds, however, "a Son of God in a deep Sleep."[3] Sterry is also said to have assured his hearers that Cromwell had

---

[1] Sterry, Englands Deliverance From the Northern Presbytery (London, 1652), quoted by Pinto, op. cit., p. 25.

[2] Pinto, op. cit., p. 35.

[3] Sterry, The Rise, Race, and Royalty of the Kingdom of God in the Soul of Man (London, 1683), hereafter quoted as RRR. Here, p. 497.

III48 ascended into heaven, and that he was sitting at Christ's right hand making intercession for England![1]

His sermons disclose a powerful and vivid sense of divine immanence springing from a profound sense of the wonder and mystery of all things. He adored the divine in nature, and nature for showing forth the divine.

> *There is not the lowest thing which hath not God in it*; for God fills all. Yet, as the sun-beams fall on a Dunghill, and are not polluted, but shine on the Dunghill; so God is still himself to himself, high and glorious in the lowest Things. The Creature is nothing of itself, or by itself, but a *momentary emanation* from God, sent forth by him, . . . and filled with him.[2]

His writing is buoyant and joyous. His immanentalism causes him at times to abound in optimistic confidence and zest.

The indication of neo-Platonic thought in this passage is well borne out by this following extract:

> God is the Light, the Creature the Shadow, which here are interwoven, and shine mutually; the Creature by God, God in the Creature: so Both make but One appearance One Kingdome.
>
> This is the Middle-State of things: Thorow this, God first Descends into Nature: Thorow this, All Things Ascend and return again out of Nature unto God. . . .[3]

And again, in another place he writes:

---

[1] Pinto, *op. cit*., p. 36.

[2] Sterry, *The Appearance of God to Man in the Gospel, and the Gospel Change* (London, 1710), p. 276, quoted by Pinto, *op. cit*., p. 96.

[3] Sterry, *The Clouds in Which Christ Comes* (London, 1647), hereafter quoted as *CCC*. Here, p. 4.

III49

> Being itself, in its universal Nature, from its purest heighth, by beautiful, harmonius, just degrees and steps, descendeth into every Being. . . . All ranks and degrees of Being, so become like the mystical steps in that scale of Divine Harmony and Proportions, Jacob's Ladder.[1]

The world of sense is below the realm of reason, and that of reason is below the domain of the spirit.[2]

Sterry's attitude toward the world of daily experience is wonderfully illustrated by the following quotation. Its teaching is close to that of Hinduism, that the Divine One dreams forth the world:

> When God shall awaken himself upon the World, then shall it be known that he alone is the Eye, the Light, the Life of the World . . . a long sleep hath lain upon Men, upon the whole world for many generations.

He interprets Psalm 76:20: "As a dream when one awaketh, so, O Lord, when thou awakest, thou shalt despise their Image." Sterry explains that,

> God the supream and Eternal Spirit is here presented, bringing forth this World, as a man doth a dream in his sleep. . . . When this Eternal Spirit, in whose sleep, like painted forms in a dream, they (the things of this world) vainly flutter about, awakeneth himself, he at once dissolveth them into their own nothingness and despiseth them as having never been anything. . . . As dreams are imaginations in the Fancy which act their parts while Man sleepeth: such was this Image after which Man with the whole world was made.[3]

---

[1] Sterry, A Discourse of the Freedom of the Will (London, 1675), hereafter DFW. Here, p. 30; the language is similar to Everard's.

[2] Sterry, The Spirit Convincing of Sinne (London, 1645), hereafter quoted as SCS. Here, p. 10.

[3] Quoted by Pinto, op. cit., p. 94, sans phrase.

III50 It would be hard to find another passage which would illustrate so well the tendency of the Platonistic tradition to rob this world of its own value and to deprive history of any meaning. We can be sure that this type of teaching, emanating from Cambridge, was not lost on those sects whose religious inwardness was already emasculating the outer, as in the case of the Familists.[1]

The image of sleep and dream is extended by Sterry to describe our own experience of the world. Although in the following passage he begins positively by referring to the divine element in man, it cannot be said that what follows is very reassuring or very helpful to anyone attempting to wrest meaning from life, or conversely put, to imprint some creative order upon chaotic happenings:

> Every man in his natural state is a divine Spirit, an Immortal Soul, an Image of God, a Son of God in a deep Sleep. The Natural Sleep is defined to be a perfect ligation, or binding up of all the senses outward, or inward; but this is an unnatural Sleep, into which we are cast by the Enchantments of the Devil. It is the Sleep of Sin. . . .

After these ominous words, Sterry continues:

> Every thing pleasant everything Real, every thing Divine is to thee, as if it were not at all: yet is not thy sleep quiet. All this, which thou seemest to thyself to hear, to see, to understand, to converse with by any of thy senses, or faculties, is a Dream in thy sleep, a delusive, a defiling, a melancholy Dream, where false, and filthy showes of Pleasures are mingled with tumultuous disquiets, confusions, torments, fears, and Horrours.

---

[1] Limitation of space here forbids an account of Sterry's interpretation of Christian doctrine in neo-Platonic terms, of how he, following Everard, sees Christ immanent in Nature, and how he develops the Christ-Logos theme. Readers interested in this should refer to CCC, pp. 1-12, especially.

III51 Life, then, is a ghastly illusion, and Sterry goes on with his analysis of it in words which are quite terrible:

> This Sleep is the Sleep of Death, not a Natural, and momentary Death, which is meer cessation of Life with a rest from all its troubles, but a living Death, the second Death, a Hellish Death, the Death of damned Spirits. . . . This Sleep is a true Death, and this Death is truely a Sleep, a living Death, or an unquiet Sleep full of evil Dreams.[1]

There is obviously a connection between Sterry's Platonistic philosophy and this expression of acute melancholy. It is probably not the whole cause, however, and to the subject of melancholy in Sterry's writing we shall return again towards the end of this chapter.

Sterry, like the other Platonists, takes an interest in "reason" but he proceeds to a point of view which represents a critical stage in the place occupied by that tormented element in respectable intellectual circles. My purpose is, he writes, ". . . to set before you the Spirit of the Lord Jesus; that Spirit, by which we know those things, which Reason cannot reach; and live, not as Men . . .but as Partakers of the Divine Nature."[2]

So Sterry actually takes the step, merely suggested in More and Whichcote, of asserting that one must go entirely beyond "reason" in order to acquire true understanding. It

---

[1] RRR, p. 497.

[2] SCS, p. 2. This view of reason, typically Platonistic, is similar to that of Cusanus who also was in vogue at this time. Cusanus' De Visione Dei was englished a few months after SCS was published. Rufus Jones believes that Everard was the translator.

III52 is, however, difficult for Sterry's readers to determine the nature and content of this experience. Here, we are in the realm of divine madness as Sterry himself actually implies: "Christ and his Disciples were as mad men; they fill'd the world with a noise of things, as present, reall mighty in glory." They spoke everywhere, he says, of a "rising sun," an "wonderful Light" which made all other lights a deep darkness. Other men could see nothing but by the light of ordinary reason. But the light which exceeded all other lights in glory was supplied by the mystical indwelling of Christ:

> Have you Seen the Lord Jesus Coming in the Spirits of Men on Earth? The Kingdome of God commeth not with Observation. For the Kingdome of God is within you. . . . This is not obvious to Sense or Reason grounded upon Sence. For it comes not their way, from without. It bubbles up from an inward Spring, like Life. From within it Enlarges it Selfe, as Circles from the Center. . . .[1]

Reason is, then, grounded upon sense.[2] Her glory is departed. Reason is dethroned and cast into the dust. No more can men look to her to guide their footsteps in the horror of darkness in which they dwell. Only Christ is the true light, but he seems not to lighten every man coming into the world. It is true that Christ indwells all the world of created things, but his Light shines only for the eye of supra-mundane faith.

---

[1] CCC, p. 33. Cf. SCS, p. 6.

[2] Sterry may be affected by Descartes who also based reason on sense. But, of course, Sterry sees this to its detriment!

III53 Sterry's epitaph for "reason" is as follows: "Reason's self must first be cast into a deep sleep and die, before she can rise again in the brightnesse of the Spirit."[1]

It is paradoxical, then, that the Cambridge Platonists who began by proclaiming the glory of reason, and by insisting on her vital role in religion should, in fact, undermine their own undertaking. In this they were faithful to Plato who, in his Symposium, maps out this very path, as Socrates records his surrender to the mysteries of Apollo and to the Word of the prophetess Diotima.[2]

Sterry's views on the status and nature of "reason" follow logically from his thorough-going monism. Spirit is the only Absolute and is prior to the immediately cognitive, and to the synthetic and analytic activity of reason.

A deterministic view of man also follows logically: God is in all things, all things possess their being in God. This indicates to Sterry an inward harmony in all things. Liberty for man is a relation or harmony between the essence or nature of each thing and its operations; it is freedom to follow that endeavor wherewith a thing endeavors to persist in its being:

> Everything, everywhere, lieth within the bounds of this Divine Harmony, is measured and governed by it, springing forth from it, beareth a part in it, is Harmony in

---

[1] Quoted by Pinto, op. cit., p. 16, sans phrase.

[2] Plato, Symposium, 210, 211.

III54

> this Harmony. . . . This is God . . . Harmony itself . . . diffusing itself through all things, endlessly and boundlessly unfolding itself into all forms of things. . . . Can there be now any one thing in the nature of things, any one thing in the will of any Spirit, any one essence, form, power, act . . . which lies not in, which flows not from this first and universal spring, the Divine Unity?[1]

This has the nature of a general statement; He is quite explicit, however, in the following lines:

> If God be the first Cause, if the Will be a second Cause, if the Acts of the Will, and the determination of the Will in these Acts, be the effects of the Will, then is God the universal cause of all these, then is he more truly and effectually the cause of each act and determination of the Will, then the Will itself.[2]

It is easy to see that this doctrine quite effectively makes God the Author of all deeds, and if a man will have it so, likewise the Author of evil. In our first chapter we saw that Ranters were accused of holding precisely this doctrine. This teaching may be derived just as effectively from either a pantheistic schema or from a monotheistic one which lays great emphasis on the divine sovereignty: Richard Baxter read Sterry's Discourse on the Freedom of the Will and approved of it highly! Nevertheless he, Baxter, was quick to see the implications of the doctrine with respect to the question of evil and gives a long discussion to the question.[3]

---

[1] DFW, p. 13.

[2] DFW, p. 43. Cf. Pinto, op. cit., pp. 105-106.

[3] Richard Baxter, Catholick Theologie, Part II (London, 1675).

III55 What does Sterry himself think about the matter? He is in obvious difficulty: he is split between thought and feeling. As is natural to an idealistic pantheist, he takes a view of evil that scarcely takes its reality and force into account: his view is shallow and superficial: "No evil, as evil is the nature or choice of any person, but the mishap, and the disease . . . Good is the only object of the Will."[1] If a man sin, it is because he is deceived as to his real good. Sin and evil, he says, forms itself by the hellish enchantments of the Prince of darkness into the most alluring image of Truth and Goodness.

Sterry here is taking up an anti-Calvinist position, holding that the will is not fallen and corrupt. However, elsewhere he sounds like a typically orthodox Christian:

> O Man! Thy God is the First Principle. Thou didst stand in Him as in thy Root . . . How art thou fallen to the ground . . .? No good thing cometh near thee. Sin hath done this. . . . Beware, O Men! Of the Evil of Sin. You cast out anew the Divine Seed . . . by every new act of Sin. . . .[2]

Perhaps under the influence of Boehme[3] Sterry admits God's ultimate responsibility for evil and sin, but in this context he argues for the unreality of it. Sin is nothing positive, it is a mere privation caused by a withdrawal of

---

[1] DFW, preface.

[2] RRR, p. 359.

[3] Pinto nowhere mentions this possibility, preferring to see the influence of Spinoza. The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church, however, points to Boehme's influence as a fact.

III56 God from his own creation. It is part of the divine Plan, and a manifestation of the divine wisdom which has designed a universe with a place for all degrees of being and not-being. Sterry is a contender for the doctrine of the "Fall upwards;" it was necessary in order to bring man to true wisdom and virtue. Evil is thus both nothing and something, a postulate which we shall meet in Boehme. But Boehme has a much more acute feeling for the reality and power of evil. He allows his experience of life to inform his theory. Sterry underplays his. He is determined, like Henry More, to give room to the most optimistic view of the true nature of deity and reality. Both these men evince in their writing that "rational piety" of which Otto speaks in contradistinction to a pure reaction to "the Holy"; that is, an experience of the Divine as wholly "other" than man, no longer apprehensible in terms of man's image, above and beyond all human evaluation, not subject at all to human moral classification; unrecognizable as a "Loving Father" image; Source and End of all--shocking, awful, dreadful. Before such a God a man might stand astonied, for in the divine darkness and divine wrath he may see the dreadful being and purpose of the power of evil and find himself upon his knees, not in worship but in submission. How different is the God of the Platonists!

It is not that Sterry is completely unaware of, or inexperienced in, such an encounter; we may well see his reaction in the mourning and lamentation expressed in his utterance. But there is no outright and clear and unambiguous

III57 expression of an experience such as Otto describes. This may be because such a thing cannot fit with his doctrinaire Platonistic position. In the pulpit sometimes, when he is speaking as one dying man to another, the anguish of the poor, human, creaturely being is given vent in words worthy of John Donne. A sinful man is brought up against the Holy, knows his creatureliness and mortality, knows his poverty of spirit and tawdry cheapness of life; and confronted with his misery, he cries out that he is unclean, and bids the Holy One depart. We see this side of Sterry in his melancholic passages. It cannot be said, therefore, that he is not a Puritan: Calvinism had made its mark in his soul.

But which is the real Sterry? Is it the sanguine Platonist or the Puritan preacher? In fine it seems that the former--extending itself in a form of mysticism--predominates.

It is possible that for him, as possibly for others, Calvinism overplays its hand, and that he shrinks from the stern, even morbid view of man which that creed proclaims. His elegant prose and graceful poetry are so civilized: they hold life and death with their misery and terror at arm's length. The same might be said of a great deal more of the preaching and writing of the Puritan "establishment."

In Sterry's case we might test this thesis by looking at some brief passages in which he speaks of the Atonement made by his suffering Christ. How does he feel about it? What does he think of it?

III58

> The Jews say that their *Messias* lies sick in Paradise of the wounds, which the Children of *Israel* have given them by their sins. Alas! how true is it that our *Messias*, our blessed Savior, who is our only Paradise, yet in the midst of us and by the vertue of his Relation to us, lies bleeding, sick, and dying of the wounds, which he receives by our Contentions, and Enmity. Thus we blast our own Paradise and turn it into a Wilderness.[1]

This passage is somewhat in the traditional vein of Christian preaching. Its effect, however, is somewhat reduced by a passage like the following:

> Philosophers ador'd the Night, accounting it to have some great Mystery and Deity in it. The Night of Christs Cross hath very much Mysterious and Divine in it. *They that go down into the Deep, see the Wonders of the Lord*. Psalms 107:23.
>
> 'Tis true of a deep of Woes, as well as Waters. He that is content to enter into the Cloud, and the saddest Retreat of it, meets with Wonders and Secrets of Glory.[2]

The same work provides us with our next and final quotation. The language is beautiful but one wonders what use it was to hearers or readers who had read the major epistles of Paul!

> The Glory of God encompasseth the World, as the Sky doth the Earth. As the Earth eclipseth the greatest part of the Sky: So the World, Dark, Gross and Envious, interposeth itself between the chiefest Parts of Divine Glory, and our Spirits. Christ subdues the World to himself. He takes away the dark Grossness from it, like a Crystal Glass, that the Beams of God may fill every Point of it, and the Person of God be seen thro' every Part. Thus God is All in every Eye, All in every object.[3]

---

[1] Sterry, *The True Way of Uniting the People of God in these Nations* (London, 1660), p. 9.

[2] *AGM*, p. 279.

[3] *AGM*, p. 309. This notion, that the Work of Christ is reification of the world, occurs in the arch-Ranter Jacob Bauthumley, but in a very minor and reduced way: "God is man'd in our flesh . . . to destroy flesh's corruption." *Light and Dark Sides of God*, pp. 29-30.

III59 Such is Christ's Work: it is reification of the world. From an historical perspective, it may remind one of a major trend in the writings of the early Greek Fathers. They also exhibited at times a greater interest in religious metaphysics than in painful moral issues. The emphasis here is tremendously different from that of the Western Christian tradition in general, and from Calvinism in particular. It shows a *very* marked reaction from the concept of Jesus who was "made sin" for man, and who bore the Wrath of God on behalf of his fellows. The notion of the Wrath of God is almost totally absent from Sterry (as from More). Does this further indicate a reaction by Sterry against Calvinism's strong statement of the case? The idea of fallen and corrupt man's miserable state certainly finds expression in Sterry's preaching but his outcries are of sorrow rather than of denunciation. It is as though, rather than seeking forgiveness, he wants to be picked up out of the mire. He was an extremely sensitive soul, perhaps simply unable to bear the thought of human responsibility for evil and unable to look upon God's angry Face. If so, he was not alone in this very human reaction. There is a limit to how much guilt a man can bear especially if he be inclined to scrupulosity. The preaching of man's dreadful crimes and of God's terrible Wrath has always been potent in exciting man's anger with himself and despair of himself: the examples of the Cathari and of Luther provide good examples of the fact. The doctrines of Platonism which intellectualize and abstract the

III60 force of evil and the fact of sin--which actually seek to emasculate it of its power and mitigate it in concept--serve well as an insulator and balm for sensitive nerves. Under the influence, then, of these doctrines, Sterry's presentation of the Atonement is a pale shadow of the robust Christian doctrine which is rooted in an agonizing struggle between a total Love and a terribly real power of Darkness.

One sees here a great difference between Sterry and Everard who is less troubled than Sterry by the conflict between the Platonistic and Christian *Weltanschauungen*, and who is more convinced by the latter than he is fascinated by the former. But Sterry represents more closely the trend in mystical and quasi, even pseudo, mystical groups.

As it happens, Sterry was aware that his thoughts might not be without danger, especially his allowing that the Divine must be responsible for the evil in the universe (a thought that More found horrifying and unacceptable), and that, therefore, both sin and corruption are part of the divine order: He says:

> But you will perhaps say, All these things seem hitherto to confirm the Ranters in their *licentious* Principles and Practices. For, why should not *Sinners* with the freedom of all sinful pleasures, *rest* and *rejoyce* in the *absoluteness* of the Divine Conduct, the Perfection of the Divine Order and Beauty . . .?[1]

Indeed, why not? Sterry's logic is perfectly clear. But again thought and feeling do not agree! Elsewhere he says:

---

[1] Pinto, *op. cit.*, p. 109, *sans phrase*.

III61 "Can any think they have the Spirit of Grace in them, and yet sin, and yet not mourn for sin? Can any man paint his foule lusts with the specious name of this holy Spirit?"[1]

Sterry has difficulty in answering his questions. He says, in effect, that those who take from this doctrine a license to sin have formed a wrong image of the divine. A man who rightly contemplates the harmony of the universe will be himself governed by that harmony, and will be free from sin's discord. These answers are not very effective, and Pinto, his biographer, feels bound to add, "it cannot be said that he shows any deep feeling in his treatment of the question."[2]

On the subject of melancholy in Sterry's writing we cannot here attempt any extended treatment, but we cannot leave him without pointing to this element. A few very short passages will serve to illustrate his thoughts which spring more from his feelings as a corrupt man than from his ruminations as a Platonistic philosopher--though both sources make their contribution.

Melancholy was no stranger to Sterry, as in the case of so many of his contemporaries, in spite of his ebullience and optimism:

> When the blackest Cloud of melancholy rests upon thy Spirit, when the sharpest Sword of Grief pierceth thy Heart, retire into thy Spiritual Principle, there

---

[1] SCS, p. 32.

[2] Pinto, op. cit., p. 109.

III62

> thou shalt be, as on Mount Tabor, the Mount of Transfiguration, where the Face of thy God shall be as a pleasant Sun of Joy, and Glory shining forth in its strength within thee. . . .[1]

That Sterry had need of his own advice we may be sure, especially as we read words like the following:

> Look up, oh man! See this whole World of these Heavens and this Earth, as a Charnel-house, or a dark Vault for the Dead. See thy self in this Body as a melancholy Coffin in the midst of this Vault. . . . See this place in which thou now art, the smoaky porch, and gloomy entrance into Hell, like a cloudy Evening to that dismal Night. See thy self walking here as a wretched Ghost and Shade in the midst of the Dead, in the midst of cursed Apparitions from below, and thy self together with all these, ready every moment to vanish into everlasting Darkness and Flames.[2]

If these lines are a fair indication of his feelings, it can occasion no surprise that he had a few pages previously welcomed death, as follows:

> In a Garden of Flowers by Night, the Flowers are seen in dusky, and dark Forms, while the shades of the night lay upon them, as Vails upon their beauties. . . . Death is the lovely, and rosy Morning of Eternal Day rising upon them.[3]

In these passages and others previously quoted, we should recognize the effect of the Christian doctrine of the Fall upon the religious psychology of the Puritan epoch. In Sterry and perhaps in others of similar mind, the effect of the "naughting" of the world, produced by neo-Platonic type

---

[1] RRR, p. 473.

[2] RRR, p. 500.

[3] RRR, p. 485; Cf. p. 463.

III63 metaphysics, is emphasized by the doctrine of the Fall so much stressed in Calvinistic preaching. Sterry speaks of the "Curse with the stings and sense of it upon the Natural, and Temporary Principle. . . ."[1] It is true that he believes that, somehow, Christ saved man from the toils of this kingdom of Darkness, but his experience of the world is a haunted one, the world of the Curse:

> This Eternal Person, our Jesus, with his God-Head in his whole Humanity both Soul, and Body in the moment of Death by dying, went entirely forth from the Natural, or temporary Principle, and so from under the Curse.[2]

It does not seem possible in Sterry's theology to live a "saved life" in this world. One must be always pining and longing for the next. Here, in this world, there are only shadows, vanity, frustrations, sickness of soul, and anguish.

The reader will remember that towards the end of the last chapter, the Familist doctrine of salvation was stated in terms of the restoration of Adam's image in man. Sterry, however, who may well have known this doctrine, is moved by his despair of the natural to take up a contrary position:

> A Living soule in her full glory, as she was in the first man in innocencie, In Paradise, is not the Principle of the second man, the new birth but the All-quickening the Eternall Spirit.[3]

He is even more specific where he writes,

---

[1] RRR, p. 473.

[2] RRR, loc. cit.

[3] SCS, p. 25.

III64

> A Living soule, with the highest improvements, raised to the noblest actings of Wit, Reason, Worth, is naturall not spirituall; the Image of the First Adam, not the image of the Lord Jesus.[1]

For the "naturall and spirituall man differ as much as earth and heaven; corruption and immortality; flesh and spirit."

Here we see an ethical dualism superimposed upon the metaphysical monism. This dualism is a feature of Plotinus' teaching itself, endemic in Christianity, and manifested in the sects. Indeed, if we take seriously Sterry's metaphor that the body is the soul's coffin, we are back with the soma-sema (the body-tomb) of Gnosticism. It is an echo of St. Paul's words, "Oh wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?"[2]

Sterry's mind told him that God was in all things, however lowly, and that nothing was vile. But his heart spoke differently. Far from being a sphere for encounter with the divine, the body was not merely a veil between man and God but a barrier:

> The Temples of our Bodies are covered with a corrupt Flesh, that we can hardly discern their Spiritual Beauties. They are too frequently in too great a part filled with a smoak of Hell, the Smoak of the Spirit of this world, that a Believer can rarely enter into this Temple of his Body to behold, and converse with the Glory there.[3]

---

[1] SCS, p. 25.

[2] Paul, Romans, vii, 24.

[3] RRR, p. 463.

III165 Only the grave can set one free to pass from death into life. It is a melancholy prospect.

Summary and Conclusion

Sabine's comments upon Winstanley's environment[1] **in which** he indicates that ecclesiastical and civil, religious, and secular issues are not to be separated are apt and important. He has discerned that the religious life of a man is not a mere element within a man but an aspect of the man *in toto*. Abstraction of religious life as an element for study, therefore, must be in some degree misleading, even while it is necessary. We have given no account of the secular interests of Everard and Sterry because there is little space, and in any case, rather a paucity of information, and not because we could not learn something more of them through these activities. Everard, in particular, was a restive political animal showing the same inner conviction and independence as he displayed in his ecclesiastical and spiritual life. Because he was a priest we tend to see him as a religious man with secular interests rather than--as we might see Winstanley of the Diggers, Walwyn of the Levellers, and certainly Cromwell--as a secular man with a spiritual life and religious insights. Yet Everard was active and vigorous, and in the best sense, worldly--very much alive and

---

[1] G.H. Sabine, *The Works of Gerrard Winstanley* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1941), p. 3, *et passim*.

III66 in no way quietist or defeatist. Here we see mystical religion at its best, free from neurosis, and, above all, interested. Short references to him in many places witness to his ubiquity and hint at his importance in the formation and progress of the tradition of mystical religion, so that historians of the period, such as Whiting, Sippell, Haller, and Jones, all find it necessary to mention him. We cannot be sure, however, that his influence truly reflects the man in all respects for though he was called "Ranting Everard" in a popular pamphlet, and Sippell sees his influence in Jacob Bauthumley the arch-Ranter, we have no other evidence that Everard really ranted, and in fact, Sippell sees his ideas in Bauthumley only in a distorted from. In reality, Everard stands for a rich Christian immanentalism wedded to an intellectual neo-Platonistic pantheism, a tradition we see continued, though with idiomatic variations, in the Platonistic School at Cambridge. These men, of the intellectual elite, gave support in their various fashions, to the movement of mystical religion. Their theologies displayed an uneasy combination of Puritanism and Platonism but emphasizing a trait, common to both traditions, of a dissatisfaction with this world, and a looking on and out to another. Whereas Puritanism was divided--and wanted to reform this world as well as to leave it behind, Platonism was scarcely concerned with this world save as a witness to an ultimate perfection beyond it. It thus gave overemphasis to a legitimate Christian preoccupation, throwing it out of

III67 balance with Christian concern for the world of the present. This derogatory attitude toward the world and the flesh was aggravated by the "new philosophy" which not only pointed to the corruption and running-down of the universe, but rendered traditional sea-marks dubious. This challenge could scarcely be met in those quarters where men but dreamed of the golden age, and where reason's muscles had been dystrophied by mysticizing. And creeping in under this weakened posture we see the shadow of the prevalent melancholy.[1]

As late Platonism in its various influences alien to the authentic Christian mind proved to be a disruptive element in the Christian's grasp upon the reality of life and of history, so also another insidious and seductive doctrine--not altogether unrelated to the other--took hold upon the religious imagination of the mid-seventeenth century. This was the vivid and exciting occult teaching of the Teutonic Philosopher, Jacob Boehme. In a time of doubt, when the traditional Christian cosmogony was being questioned both by scholars and by the unlearned, this mystic philosopher, who--

---

[1] Burton, in his Anatomy of Melancholy (1621), speaking "of Religious Melancholy," writes mockingly:

> So shuts the moping bird of night
> Her feeble eyes against the light
> That glads the cheerful day;
> And when prevailing darkness raignes,
> Through groves obscure, and dreary plains,
> She wings her dubious way.

This quotation is taken from the London edition of 1801, p. 380.

III68 Cleopatra-like--clutched the Serpent of evil and chaos to the very breast, provided a way of understanding and to serenity. To his teaching Boehme brought the authority of the visionary and the language of the seer. Though he spoke in a strange tongue his grammar was familiar to those who had also wandered in religion's nether regions, and only his recondite vocabulary needed to be learned.

It is to this man that we must turn in the next chapter.

IV1

CHAPTER IV

PHILOSOPHUS TEUTONICUS

The influence of Jacob Boehme in England during the seventeenth century was widespread and in some areas profound. One cannot depict the full extent of his power with any certainty, however, since, while his ideas appear in many guises, sometimes in a fragmentary way or in distorted forms in many places, their source is unmentioned and perhaps unrecognized. His influence on the Cambridge Platonists is very probable--almost as certain in the case of Peter Sterry as it is in that of the Ranters--but also it is widely observable among the sects.[1]

Boehme was first presented to English readers in 1644 in an anonymous publication, The Life of One Jacob Boehme, and translations of his complete works became available

---

[1] Cp. R. Jones, Spiritual Reformers in the 16th and 17th Centuries (London: Macmillan, 1914), pp. 172-234, and C.E. Whiting, Studies in English Puritanism from the Restoration to the Revolution 1660-1688 (London: S.P.C.K., 1931), pp. 295ff. Boehme's dates were 1575-1624. Thomas Underhill in his Hell Broke Loose (London, 1660), p. 15, points to Boehme's influence on at least some of the Ranters, those of a "more soberer sort," saying they were "possest with the fancies of Jacob Bemon the German paracelsian Prophet. . . ." His reference is likely to be to followers of Jacob Bauthumley as we shall notice in Chapter VII.

IV2 between 1645 and 1662, made for the most part by John Sparrow and his kinsman John Ellistone.[1] This does not exclude the possibility of the circulation in some quarters of German editions, of Dutch translations, and possibly English translations in MS before these dates. This might well explain the appearance of the short biography in 1644.

What are the possible main points of connection between Boehme and the Ranters?

In reading the Ranter writings one cannot but be impressed by the strong awareness of the power and reality of evil evinced in them. We see this either in their shuddering and revulsion--as in the clearer and penitential moments of Salmon and Bauthumley--or else in their frantic efforts to deny that it existed at all!

This painful awareness of evil is to be detected in university and conventicle in the England of this period. Intellectuals, like Henry More, attempt to explain away evil for reasons of aesthetic sensibility or in the interests of a rational cosmic order, while frightened, guilty, and simple sectarians, like Muggletonians and Ranters, might deeply wish to disbelieve in a cosmic Fiend.

Boehme's acceptance of the reality of evil, and his incorporation of it into his total pantheistic scheme, seems to have appeared satisfactory to many. There was a certain intellectual appeal in his dialectical handling of the matter; there was an undoubted mystical appeal to those of occult inclinations; and, perhaps above all, this position agreed with experience! That this pantheistic metaphysic agreed ill with the Christian world-view does not appear to have weighed heavily with those thousands who came under Boehme's spell.

---

[1] For a complete list of published translations and dates, cp. Whiting, op. cit., p. 321.

But, as we noticed in our previous chapter, pantheistic ideas had been widely disseminated in the Christian West for many centuries. They had always found a ready harbor in the minds of mystics; they were transmitted in a polished Platonistic form by Plotinus and Pseudo-Dionysius, and, in the modern era, they were given added force by the leanings of Renaissance men of science who saw that "Nature was God in things."

Averroes had made his contribution in the twelfth century, and it, like that of Justus Lipsius the seventeenth century Stoic reviver, was gratefully received by some in England. In the middle of the seventeenth century, the ancient "atheistic" philosophies provided readily available alternatives for those unconvinced by Christian theology and for those obsessed by fear of the living God! Later on, we shall consider some of these factors as possible influences on Ranters.

Pantheism is reconcilable with optimism if it be received into a secure emotional situation--perhaps born of mystical experience or intellectual assurance--but it may

IV4 contribute to deep pessimism and to despair if it be received into a state of melancholy. An oppressive sense of evil, such as that evident among Ranters, may lead to a loss of the sense of divine transcendence, and to the shrinking of the spiritual cosmos into a materialistic form. To that important point we shall return. Boehme himself, pantheist though he was, preserved the sense of divine transcendent power in his profound awareness of the unknowability of God, and in the dread he felt before the Holy. The light and the dark sides of God he presented in the form of a fascinating dialectic.

Fascinating though it may be, this dialectical teaching cannot provide its readers with that inner fortitude which can be derived only from interior, mystical communion; and the realization of the horror of God's holiness sometimes proves to be crushing to those of sensitive mien, especially if perhaps already burdened with guilt. For the dark side of God is not only that He cannot be seized upon: His is the terrible Will which ordains and fulfills, which makes and unmakes, and His is the Wrath which will condemn and destroy. Later on in this chapter Lodowicke Muggleton will tell us of his own guilt, horror, and despair.

In the light of what had been said above, however, it is not difficult to explain the attractiveness of Boehme's work to others even though his books are so voluminous and so obscure. Still, there are yet other factors to be mentioned such as his dependence upon certain of the "Spiritual

IV5 Reformers" whose ideas had already gained currency among those dedicated to "inward" or "spiritual" religion.[1] Further,

> He was deeply influenced . . . by Luther, especially in two directions. He got primarily from the great reformer his transforming insight of the immense importance of personal faith for salvation, and secondly he was impressed . . . with the awful reality and range of the principle of positive evil in the universe, upon which Luther had rested with intensity of emphasis.[2]

These elements, central to Protestant preaching, had a general appeal, but the other elements, which he took from the "Spiritual Reformers" included an emphasis on the inwardness of true religion, a stress on the necessity of new birth, and the necessity of freeing the spirit from the letter. These themes, it will be recalled, were central to the sects of the "Radical Reformation" including Familism. Boehme's nature mysticism or theosophy, couched in the symbolism of Paracelsus, he may owe in part to Schwenckfeld, Franck, and others by way of Weigel.[3] But we may perhaps see the influence of Hans Denck in Boehme's acceptance of evil as an indispensable part of the natural order.

* * * * *

Jacob Boehme believed himself to possess a revelation for the world, a revelation to be added to the teaching of Christ,

---

[1] Cp. Jones, *op. cit.*, p. 154; also Whiting, *op. cit.*, p. 296; also N. Thune, *The Behmenists and the Philadelphians* (Uppsala, Almquist and Wiksells Boktryckeri Ab, 1948); also S. Hutin, *Les Disciples Anglais de Jacob Boehme* (Paris: Editions Denoël, 1960).

[2] Jones, *op. cit.*, p. 154.

[3] This is the opinion of Jones, *loc. cit.*, and Whiting, *loc. cit.*

IV6 declaring,

> . . . the philosophy and the deep ground of God, celestial bliss; the creation of angels; the horrible fall of the Devil which is the origin of evil; the creation of the world; the deep Ground and mystery of man and of all creatures in this world; the last judgement and the metamorphosis of this world; the mystery of the resurrection of the dead and of eternal life.[1]

In other words, Boehme offered a complete cosmogony, a complete explanation of the entire order of things by which the saga of human life could be understood. In doing so he enunciated ideas which from time to time reappear in a transmuted form in the writings of the arch-Ranters.

God[2] is described by Boehme as being beyond any distinctions and beyond good and evil. He is, it might be said, in the popular Ranter phrase, an infinite Nothing:

> One cannot say of God that he is this or that, good or evil, or that He has made distinctions within himself. For He is in Himself without a nature, free from passions and unlike any creature. He does not incline towards anything, for in His sight it is nothing . . . neither good nor bad. He is in Himself the Ungrund without any will with respect to Nature or creature: He is as an eternal Nothing, and does not suffer because anything turns to Him or not. He is the Unique Being, and there is nothing before or after Him in which He could anchor or secure His Will. He took His origin from none neither did any give Him forth. He is the Nothing and the All, and is a unified Will in which the world and the whole creation lies: in Him is all equally eternal without beginning, of equal importance, balance, and aim. He is

---

[1] Boehme, Aurora, ix, 8; Cf. Thune, op. cit., p. 18; Thune's translation here quoted.

[2] The word "God" in Boehme is ambiguous, signifying both the featureless Ungrund and its manifestation to the universe.

> neither Light nor Darkness, neither Love nor Strife, but eternally the One. He is Will--which is an Abyss, incomprehensible, beyond Nature, and uncreaturelike, and which is unique; He has nothing before Him or after Him, who is in Himself but One, existing as Nothing and Who is yet All. He is, and is called, the Single God; He holds and finds Himself in Himself, and God proceeds forth from God.[1]

This passage from the De Electione Gratiae states Boehme's basic metaphysic succinctly and usefully and has therefore been chosen for quotation even though it did not appear in English until 1655, after most of the arch-Ranter writings had appeared on the bookstalls. The general doctrine was already available in such complicated works as De Tribus Principiis.[2]

---

[1] Boehme, De Electione Gratiae, i, 34. This writer's translation. The text is as follows:

> man kann nicht von Gott sagen, dass Er dis oder das sey, böse oder gut, dass Er in sich selber Unterscheide habe: Denn Er ist in sich selber Naturlos, sowol Affect- und Creatur-los. Er hat keine Neiglichkeit zu etwas, denn es ist nichts vor Ihme, darzu Er sich könte neigen weder Böses noch Gutes: Er ist in sich selber der Ungrund, ohne einigen Willen gegen der Natur und Creatur, als ein ewig Nichts; es ist keine Qual in Ihme, noch etwas das sich zu Ihme oder von Ihme könte neigen. Er ist das Einige Wesen, und ist nichts vor Ihme oder nach Ihme, daran oder darinnen Er Ihme könte einen Willen schöpfen oder fassen; Er hat auch nichts das ihn gebäret oder giebet: Er ist das Nichts und das Alles, und ist ein Einiger Wille, in deme die Welt, und die gantze Creation lieget, in Ihme ist alles gleich-ewig ohne Anfang, in gleichem Gewichte, Mass und Ziel; Er ist weder Licht noch Finsterniss, weder Liebe noch Zorn sondern das Ewige Eine . . . Derselbe ungründliche, unfassliche, unnatürliche und uncreatürliche Wille, welcher nur Einer ist, und nichts vor Ihme noch hinter Ihme hat; welcher in sich selber nur Eines ist, welcher als ein Nichts und doch Alles ist: Der ist und heisset der Einige Gott; welcher sich in sich selber fasset und findet, und Gott aus Gott gebieret.

[2] No attempt will be made here to give a complete account of Boehme's teaching. Many works are available which do this.

IV8 Boehme's scheme is a form of idealistic pantheism which tries to preserve nevertheless a sense of God's essential transcendence. It appears to owe its genesis to neo-Platonistic tradition possibly transmitted from Pseudo-Dionysius by way of Erigena, the Beghards, Beguines, and the Brethren of the Free Spirit.[1] Boehme seems more likely to have received the doctrine by this route than via that of scholarly communion. It might be more useful, actually, to call Boehme's formulation a "panentheism"[2] for all lies "in His Will," and Boehme conceives something "outside" the world: "We understand that outside of Nature there is an eternal silence and peace, like unto that Nothing,"[3] and it is from and within this Emptiness that the Eternal Nothing manifests His Will, leading forth the Nothing into Something.[4]

Boehme was aware that his view of the world was not orthodox but he argues in the Aurora that if God made all things out of nothing then the visible world would be no revelation of Him, for it would have nothing of Him in

---

Here, only those aspects of his teachings which are particularly relevant to our purpose receive attention, i.e., the elucidation of Ranter attitudes and beliefs.

[1] For an extremely comprehensive and useful account of the pantheism of the Beghards, and indeed of the popular pantheism of that epoch, Cp. J. Hunt, An Essay on Pantheism (London: Longmans, 1866), especially pp. 167-168.

[2] Everard's teaching is also so described by Sippel, Werdendes Quäkertum.

[3] De Signatura Rerum, ii, 7.

[4] Ibid.

IV9 it,[1] which is on the face of it, a perfectly logical argument, and in this he seems to have St. Paul on his side.[2]

Behind the visible universe and in it there is an invisible universe, and behind the temporal universe and in it there is an eternal universe; for, says Rufus Jones of this teaching, the outward, visible, temporal world is "a spiration or outbreathing, or egress" of an "internal, spiritual world" which couches within, and it is a "signature" of the inward world.[3] But the "Ungrund," "Abyss," or "Great Mystery" is beyond, and prior to the existent order. The world hangs upon the Will and is in no way ultimate. It is "something," limited by its own nature, contrasted to the Nothing which has no nature to limit it. The processes which govern its mode of being and its life are a given. The world issues forth from the plenitude of the Nothing, and its processes are a vehement struggle between opposites, between the light world and the dark world.

Boehme's concept is of a dynamic interplay of contraries, not of the mere opposition of ideal essences but of a struggle between living forces:

> The reader must know that all things have their existence in Yea and Nay, be they of God, or of the Devil, or of the Earth, or whatsoever. The one, as

---

[1] Aurora, xxi, 60-62. This argument is reproduced by the arch-Ranter Jacob Bauthumley almost verbatim.

[2] Paul, Epistle to the Romans, i.

[3] Cp. Jones, Spiritual Reformers, p. 174.

IV10

> the Yea is empty strength and life and is God's Truth or God Himself. This Truth is in itself unrecognizable, and, without the Nay, there lies within it no joy or uplift or sensibility. The Nay is in opposition to the Yea or Truth, and by it Truth is established and revealed. The _Contrarium_ lies within it, and in that, the eternal Love strives sensitively, with desire, to manifest itself in love.

Boehme continues the thought elsewhere:

> . . . such is not the case only in living creatures but also in stars . . . stones . . . grass: in everything lies poison and wickedness . . . it . . . must be the case otherwise were there no life or motion, and neither color, virtue, thick nor thin . . . but all would be a nothing.[1]

The background to this doctrine seems to be the teaching of Weigel, following Paracelsus and Franck, who endeavored to explain the difficulty of the existence of evil side by

---

[1] Boehme, _Questiones Theosophicae_, iii, 2; this writer's translation. The text is as follows:

> Der Leser soll wissen, dass in Jah und Nein alle Dinge bestehen, es sey Göttlich, Teuflich, Irdisch, oder was genant werden. Das Eine, als das Jah ist eitel Kraft und Leben, und ist die Warheit Gottes oder Gott selber. Dieser wäre in sich selber unerkentlich, und wäre darinnen keine Freude oder Erheblichkeit, noch Empfindlichkeit ohne das Nein. Das Nein ist ein Gegenwurf des Jah, oder der Warheit, auf dass die Warheit offenbar, und etwas sey, darinnen ein _Contrarium_ sey, darinnen die ewige Liebe wirckend, empfindlich, wollende, und das zu lieben sey.

The second quotation is taken from _De Tribus Principiis_, Vorrede, 13:

> wie zu sehen, dass solches nicht allein in lebendigen Creaturen ist, sondern auch in Sternen . . . Steinen . . . Gras; in allen ist Gift und Bosheit . . . es also seyn mus, sonst wäre kein Leben noch Beweglichkeit, auch wäre weder Farbe, Tugend, Diches oder Dünnes oder einigerley Empfindniss sondern es wäre alles ein Nichts.

IV11 side with good. When the unity of God manifests itself in the many, peace is replaced by the strife of the manifold. Light is known by its contrast with darkness, day with night, yea with nay. Resistance strikes the spark of vitality, and so progress becomes possible.[1]

The principles of light and darkness are co-eternal, and there is no prospect of their reconciliation. Ultimate unity, if indeed it may be so described, lies beyond dualism, in the Nothing which lies beyond all distinctions. Neither good nor evil, therefore, may be said to be final elements in the sense that they characterize the *Ungrund*, though Boehme in the last quoted passage evidently regards "truth" as belonging to God. It must be remembered, however, that "God" is a manifestation of the *Ungrund* and that He exists for the universe. The concept of God does not exhaust that of the *Ungrund*, and neither light nor darkness, good nor bad, virtue or sin, therefore, are characteristics of Final Reality; but perhaps it should be called "Final Unreality" since "reality" is a human, and therefore finite, concept.

There is something faintly chilling about this idea of Deity for it recognizes courageously that Deity must be beyond personality and that divine Love, however this may be conceived, must be untroubled by the existence of evil. Such a belief may indeed introduce a certain fatalism into the mind.[1] What is the use of struggling against evil that must be? Yet it may be one's destiny to be fated to such a useless struggle. Still, the question must also be present of whether evil can be truly heinous or even undesirable, and, if so, whether, in the ordinary sense of the word, *sin* qua sin, has any existence? Doubts must exist as to Boehme's consistency in dealing with this matter. His feelings move him against evil though his "revelation" told him that its existence was determined and necessary.

---

[1] Cp. Whiting, *op. cit*., p. 296.

Sin, for Boehme, is a quality of, or function of mind, and specifically, of the imagination. The imagination--as Boehme sees it--is that which defines the real for us. Sin is the product of a "false imagination." To be the victim of such a state of mind is to be in hell: to be the possessor of a "true imagination" is to be in heaven. One cannot fail to remark here that subjectivist complexion with which we have already become very familiar.

Sin (as we saw also in Sterry who was writing later and apparently under Boehme's influence) both is and is not.

---

[1] Cp. Thune, *op. cit.*, p. 40, who quotes Bornkamm, *Luther und Böhme* (Bonn, 1925), p. 126, as saying that Boehme's concept of God is still more fatalistic than that of Luther in his *De Servo Arbitrio* which has, nevertheless, "den Charakter des persönlichen, letzen Endes doch sinvollen Handelns, das sich Ziele setzt, die sich freilich nur dem Glauben und in voller Klarheit erst in der Ewigkeit enthüllen." There is some truth in this but Bornkamm fails to distinguish between Boehme's *theory* and his experience for Boehme undercuts fatalism by surrender in complete trust to the Source of all Being.

Such being as it has is within the "false imagination," and it derives from the necessary principle of opposition in the divine dialectic. It is never *manifested* in God, however, for God is capable of no false imagination and cannot know sin. For Him it is nothing. It is truly real to the man in whose imagination it is, but it is not essentially real.

Boehme does not intend in any way to minimize the fact of evil; he was intensely conscious of it. He was faced by the problem of relating the fact of evil to the existence of Deity which he believed to be certainly the source of good. This was a theoretical problem. The naked truth was that only one Source provides the origin of the world and that, somehow, in some way, all things, good and evil, must have their beginning there. Sterry echoed this realization.

To nullify the essential reality of sin and of evil is, as we have previously noticed, the classic way of meeting the problem of its existence within the monistic system.[1] There is no darkness, no evil, in angel or devil, or man, except the nature of his own will and desire, and the latter gives birth to both darkness and light. The fall of any creature is within itself. It is the world of fallen wills which is the dark world.[2]

---

[1] There are strong suggestions, with respect to this point, of Boehme in Jno. Holland's account of Ranter beliefs summarized in Chapter I.

[2] This is commensurate with Augustine's teaching in *De Civitate Dei*.

IV14 A fallen will is a partial will--that is a will that wills for itself and not for the whole. Such wills--individualized essences--are the inevitable product of the diversification of the One into the Many, for each element in the Many maintains its being in the tension of opposition to every other individualized element.[1] It must struggle against its contrary. Evil, therefore, must appear as the fruit of individual existence,[2] and consequently, the universe manifests itself in both positive and negative aspects, each essential to the other, love and wrath, light and dark: heaven and hell are within a man.[3] This inward state of affairs establishes itself in the outward, and this is also, therefore, a double world.

There is in every soul a vision of, and a desire for, the good, and also a hunger for the particular will of self.[4] Surrender to the latter results in a soul stained with

---

[1] It is fairly obvious that Hegel was inspired by Boehme in his Phenomenologie des Geistes and especially in Chapter 6 where the same thesis is maintained.

[2] Cp. Mysterium magnum, xxix, 1-10.

[3] Of the devil Boehme writes: "Even though the devil should go many millions of miles, desiring to see heaven and enter into it, yet he would still be in hell and could not see heaven at all." Ibid., viii, 28, quoted by Jones, Spiritual Reformers, p. 187. The question of Boehme's possible influence on Milton is taken up in Margaret L. Bailey's Milton and Jacob Boehme (New York, 1914).

[4] Signatura rerum, xv, 45; Cf. Jones, Spiritual Reformers, p. 191.

IV25 darkness and divided from the way to union and to life. This choice has always been present in human nature, as indeed in angelic nature. Lucifer made evil his good; Adam consented to the desire to know both evil *and* good, and became divided against himself.[1] He lost his glory which had exceeded even that of the angels. Adam's light, however, was only dimmed whereas that of Lucifer went out.[2] Restoration--by which is meant restoration of the will to lose self-will--can be attained only by being reborn, that is, by a *process* of enlightenment. "A man must die wholly to self-hood, forsake it, and enter again into the original Nothing--the eternal Unity in which nothing is willed in particular--before God can have His way with him; all sin arises from self-hood, from desire."[3]

The theme of self-negation in order to be returned to Unity is stated even more sharply in the following words: "When thou art wholly gone forth from the creature and become nothing to all that is nature and creature, then thou art in that Eternal One which is God Himself, and then thou shalt

---

[1] This resulted also in the emergence of sexuality out of the hitherto androgynous form of man: Cp. *De Triplici Vita Hominis*, xi, 24.

[2] Cp. G.W. Allen, "Boehme," in *Hasting's Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, ii, p. 782. "His (man's) natural life is a life in death, and if the dead life is to come to real life it can only be through . . . a birth."

[3] Cp. *Signatura rerum*, xiii, 27 and xv, 9, referred to by Jones, *Spiritual Reformers*, p. 204.

IV16 experience the supreme virtue of Love."[1] Whatever is meant by "Love" here, it is not what men usually mean by that word. Here, in this context, something very negative is implied.

Boehme sees here the need for a Savior. His interest is in the regeneration of the Will and not in a juridical sacrifice, more in the metaphysics of the situation than in the ethics, reflecting, like Sterry after him, the interest of Greek theology.

Christ is concerned, he thinks, with the restoration of man, and with that of the universe as a whole. With respect to man Christ is Exemplar. Boehme says to his fellow-man, "Thou thyself must go through Christ's whole journey, and enter wholly into His process."[2] He emphasizes, as his contemporary Everard, the necessity of treading the _via dolorosa_ in the spirit of the _Imitatio Christi_, and adds elsewhere: "We become children of God in Christ . . . through an inward, resident Grace, which regenerates us into child-likeness, so that Christ the conqueror of death arises in us and becomes a dominating operation in us."[3] In imitating

---

[1] Jones, _op. cit._, pp. 204-205, quotes _The Supersensual Life_, pp. 29-30. This reduction of the self to nothing, already noted as a theme of Familism, reoccurs in the theorizing of the arch-Ranters Joseph Salmon and Jacob Bauthumley, and in the nihilistic, self-destructive conduct of Ranters associated with the arch-Ranters Abiezer Coppe and Laurance Clarkson. But the latter case is a despairing distortion of the implications of the theme.

[2] Jones, _op. cit._, p. 195, quotes _True Repentance_, _sans phrase_.

[3] Jones, _op. cit._, quotes the _First Epistle_, 6.

IV17 Christ a man enters into spiritual communion with him, and so with the Father and the Holy Spirit. Boehme develops the theme of St. John's Gospel in the seventeenth chapter.[1] The main-spring of this imitative life is Faith which is "one spirit with God," and is "the activity of God," and an assimilation of Christ into one's being.[2] The salvation of man is, then, in a word, deification by faith.

Boehme does not say a great deal about "reason" directly, but it becomes plain that "faith" is the source of all real knowledge, and indeed he says, "Reason knoweth nothing at all of God."[3] He advocates simple dependence on the Scripture when one has exhausted one's own penetration through faith.

What of the salvation of the universe at large? Christ is envisaged, as he is in the Epistles to the Ephesians and Colossians, as a Cosmic Figure. God-in-Christ becomes a Being in the three Principles by which the world is constituted, and must "by incurring cruel wrath, crush Death itself, so that Eternal Light might break out into full bloom through it." This is the eternal cosmic feature of Christ's achievement.[4]

---

[1] De Tribus Principii, iv, 9.

[2] Epistolae Theosophicae, xliv, 39.

[3] De Tribus Principii, xxv, 69. The undermining of the authority of reason is a constant element in the mysticality of the period.

[4] Cp. Thune, op. cit.; cf. De Tribus Principii, xxv, 12-14.

IV18 Like other advocates of "inward religion" Boehme is impatient with the notion of legal justification. It is not enough to know that Christ died for man: "O thou blind and foolish World, full of the devil! To know that Christ died for you and poured out his Blood for you that you should be blessed is not Faith. It is only history and information. The Devil knows it well but it does not help him."[1]

To conclude this summary of some aspects of Boehme's teaching we should inquire as to his attitude towards sex and the flesh.[2] Sex derives from the Fall of the androgynous Adam. Adam

> . . . was a man and also a wife, though she is not to be thought of as truly a wife but as a virgin altogether pure in her upbringing. Adam had the tincture-spirit of Fire and also that of Water as the essence of his fleshly substance. He loved himself, and God through himself. He could bear children, virginally, out of his will, from his essence, without travail or violence. . . .[3]

---

[1] Aurora, xx, 15. This writer's translation: the text is as follows:

> O du blinde und thörichte Welt, voll des Teufels! es ist kein Glaube, dass du weist, dass Christus für dich gestorben ist, und hat sein Blut für dich vergossen, dass du selig werden. Es ist nur eine Historia und Wissenschaft; der Teufel weiss es auch wol, es hilft ihm aber nichts. . . .

[2] "Fire" gives life and movement to everything living, and "Water" is the principle of light and love.

[3] De Triplici Vita Hominis, xi, 24; this writer's translation: the text is as follows:

> . . .er war ein Mann und auch ein Weib, aber nicht ein Weib zu verstehen, sondern eine Jungfrau, gantz rein in Zucht; Er hatte den Tinctur-Geist des Feuers, und auch den Tinctur-Geist des Wassers, als der Veneris, in sich selber; er liebete sich selber, und durch sich Gott; er konte jungfräulich gebären aus seinem Willen, aus seinen Essentien, ohne Wehe und ohne Zerreisung, einen solchen Menschen wie er war.

IV19 Elsewhere of sex he says, "You can best and most correctly describe it as an abomination to the holiness of God" which "has arisen out of sin through Adam's fall."[1]

This statement is unequivocal. But what of his view of the flesh in general? Boehme regards man as tied and bound by "two chains." One is the birth of his own life, whose inward root is poison and wrathfulness, and the other is "the flesh and blood." This is the lot of all men. But those who have experienced the new birth in Christ, and only they, "have and carry the heavenly flesh and blood in the earthly man . . . and when we die thus in the earthly body, then we live in the body of Jesus Christ, and spring up in Him out of death."[2]

Whether Boehme be a pantheist or dualist is really open to question. In *theory* he is an idealistic pantheist, but in *feeling* he is a dualist. The *Ungrund*, which is perhaps the equivalent of Plato's "receptacle," is featureless and characterless, and remains a postulate only, and a symbol of divine transcendence.[3] From the point of view of Boehme's actual experience of life, deity is "God," and the emanated world is a dynamic, writhing, struggling melée of opposing

---

[1] *Anti-Stifelius* II, 396-398, quoted by Thune, *op. cit*., p. 28.

[2] Sparrow's translation of *De Trib. Princ*., xxv, 6 and 7, and 48.

[3] He also symbolizes it as God the Father: Cp. *Psychologia Vera*, 1, 13; and *De Elec. Grat*. 1, 5, 6; Cf. Thune, *op. cit*., p. 20, and Whiting, *op. cit*., p. 296.

IV20 forces. Even God has his light and dark sides, manifested in Love and Wrath: and nothing remains untinctured by the one or the other. This might appear to many as a dismaying--even if realistic--view of life. But a feature of Christianity has been that God's ultimate responsibility for the Dark has been largely disregarded. Emphasis has been placed on God's goodness, and on his "Victory"--ultimate even if not yet present--over evil and death. It is on this doctrine that the optimistic Christian dwells. He believes that God is characterized by eternal Goodness--an immutable principle which conditions and directs His Will. The thought that God may be pure Will or Act, and that He should be wholly unconditioned and arbitrary in what He does or chooses to be is dismissed as a horrid thought. We recall More's horrified disclaimer of such a viewpoint as this, taught by Paul, Calvin, and then Boehme, in his verses before quoted, how he dismisses those "that thus pervert/The laws of God, and rashly do assert/That will rules God, but Good rules not God's Will. . . ."

Psychologically, Boehme is strengthened to gaze steadfastly into the Shadow by his extraordinary visionary experience. He is in the grip of his enlightening and transforming episode as "saints who happen to their visions," to employ Dylan Thomas' striking phrase.

Otto sees Boehme as one who is confronted by the "Holy," and says:

IV21

> In our Western Mysticism the writer in whom the non-rationally "dreadful" and even the "daemonic" phase of the numinous remains a most living element is Jakob Boehme. . . . He finds as a starting point for his speculations the "primal-bottom," the supra-comprehensible and inexpressible. But this stands to him not for Being and Above Being, but for Stress and Will; it is not good and above good, but a supra-rational identification of good and evil in an Indifferent, in which is to be found the potentiality for evil as well as for good, and therewith the possibility of the dual nature of deity itself as at once goodness and love on the one hand and fury and wrath on the other.[1]

He is like Luther in his sense of the awfulness and terror of God.

It must be added that Boehme's apprehension that "evil" is the dark side of God's sublime nature has the advantage that it takes evil into the divine ("nothing" into "Nothing") thus both containing it within the divine Providence--a salutary and encouraging thought--and, perhaps less advantageously, making it possible to give to evil a divine status.[2]

In Boehme's writings his shuddering before the Holy is only occasionally visible. The naked experience is clothed in a thickly woven vesture of verbs and nouns. Is it not perhaps the fear of the Holy that induces Boehme to babble on through so many books? "Names have a power, a strange power of hiding God,"[3] and Boehme not only names God but

---

[1] R. Otto, The Idea of the Holy, tr. by J.W. Harvey (London: Oxford University Press, rev. ed., 1928), p. 110.

[2] This happened in Hinduism where the same basic religious scheme is held, and which in the 19th century gave rise to the infamous Thugi who practiced murder as part of their way of life under the protection of Kali, the spouse of Shiv.

[3] F.W. Robertson, quoted by Otto, op. cit., p. 226.

IV22 almost attempts to *explain* the celestial mysteries[5]. May not the sense of "dread" before the Holy explain the voluminous writing of mystics in general? It functions both as a catharsis and a veil, exactly as the cloud of incense in the Sanctum Sanctorum.

It is important for us to recognize the encounter with the Holy in Boehme for we shall have occasion to notice it also in some of the Ranter writings. It is difficult for us in our modern times to give to this experience the credence and the importance which it deserves for, in general, it is too far from our experience. We are, in some sense, too rational: we have made our universe too rational or have least given it such an appearance.

Boehme's sense of the "creaturely" standing before the "Abyss" is tempered by his belief in the divinity of the innermost essence of man. "The ground of all that was in Adam is in us; for whatever Ground lay in God, the same lieth in Christ and through Him it lieth in us, for He is in us all." So runs John Sparrow, Boehme's English translator, in his "Introduction" to Boehme's works.

All in all it is very noteworthy that Boehme sees man's role in the order of things as exceedingly passive. The battle of existence is between the Light and the Dark which penetrate all things. These are essentially *cosmic* principles, not ethical ones. Man's task, if he desire his salvation by deification, is simply to surrender himself lovingly and trustfully to the divine Will. He must "die wholly to self-hood . . . and enter again into the original Nothing"; he becomes a child of God in Christ through an inward resident Grace which regenerates him; and the Faith by which these things are done is "the activity of God" in him, an "assimilation of Christ into his being. There is not much suggestion here of working out one's own salvation with fear and trembling but only that God works in us to will and to do of his good pleasure. It is as though Boehme was overwhelmed by his vision of the mighty forces at work in the universe and felt that all the puny efforts of man could avail nothing. This attitude is reproduced especially noticably in the arch-Ranter Joseph Salmon.

But Boehme is, in fact, fundamentally confident in his outlook. His sense of divine immanence is rich and vivid, and is more positive than negative. He is inclined to gaze more on God's light side than on his unapproachable dark side which is associated in feeling with divine transcendence.

Otto, of course, made the classic analysis of the encounter with the Divine--the *mysterium tremendum*--overwhelming, shocking, and pulverising, which is yet *fascinans* and the object of desire. Human beings are naturally inclined to rest with the latter after being affrighted by the former. One cannot *live* with a *mysterium tremendum*: one must seek some refuge from it. It is in *this* sense, surely, that the ancients asserted that a man cannot look upon the face of God and live!

IV24 In the seventeenth century the stress upon the divine immanence and upon the sublime consolations that drop upon the soul is marked: a quotation from Sterry serves to establish the mood: "You have seen how a Sugar-loafe dissolves, and weeps itselfe away, when it is dipt in wine. So hearts dissolve, so they melt, dip't in the sweet sense of Divine Love."[1]

Here we see a reaction against the aweful sense of the Holy which was conveyed so forcibly in Luther and Calvin and those who preached their message.[2] Otto has drawn attention to the centrality of Luther's encounter with the Holy witnessed in his writings[3] and Calvin's consciousness of the "awful decree" is well known. This is not to say that the notable seventeenth-century stress on immanentalism is entirely due to this reaction against the declaration of divine Wrath. Not so! No student of the period can doubt that an undercurrent of popular mysticism had been present in continental Europe for centuries, even perhaps since

---

[1] Sterry, SCS, p. 19; but examples could be multiplied.

[2] Boehme was much affected by Luther; Sterry was not only strongly influenced by Boehme but by Calvin; and we see this reaction in both Boehme and Sterry. Both in theory are inclined to fatalism but both, in experience and practice, continue to hope and to trust.

Dr. John Pordage, founder of the English cult of Behmenists, in his treatment and propagation of Boehme's teaching, much reduces the "Dark" and much modifies Boehme's original apprehension of the "dreadfulness" of God. Cf. Thune, *op. cit.*, pp. 40-47.

[3] Otto, *op. cit.*, p. 106. He refers especially to Luther's *De Servo Arbitrio*.

IV25 Pseudo-Dionysius.[1] We suggested earlier that the Family of Love represented perhaps the vanguard of this movement in England, and certainly its mainstream after 1600. But it seems far from unlikely that the Lutheran-Calvinist stress on divine Sovereignty, on the unconditioned Will, on the dreadful and immutable Decree, drove many away from the fatalistic conception of God as the Potter, and man as the humble, earthenware pot. This preaching added by reaction a psychological augmentation to the current of Renaissance humanism already flowing in scholarly circles, and to the simple belief in the love of God held within the sects. The movement towards inward and mystical religion was substantially aided by a search for confidence in an age when security was hard to find. It is often suggested in works dealing with Calvinism and the Puritans that the Calvinist doctrine of Predestination was a source of confidence and stability. It was natural, it is averred, that holders to this doctrine should consider themselves members of the Elect.[2] This is surely true, for the most part. But is it wholly true? Mention is rarely, if ever, made of the others, those who were full of doubt about their salvation, those who lived in horror beneath the shadow of Condemnation.

---

[1] Cf. Ullmann, *Reformers Before the Reformation*, quoted in Hunt, *op. cit.*, p. 166.

[2] Cp. for example, Haller, *Liberty and Reformation in the Puritan Revolution* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1955), pp. 163-164, 197 and 344.

IV26 Perhaps they were few in comparison, but were they so few as to be negligible? Proliferation of the sects suggests that they were not. Sects provided alternative ways to salvation--to some sort of salvation--where Calvinism had engendered, not faith but fear. We have seen how Familists preferred the belief in deification by mystical coinherence, and we know that the English Behmenists[1] followed the path of deification by faith. Quakers likewise rebelled against legalism and the threat of justice and took refuge in the Light within. Seekers did not know where to seek or what to seek for, so they simply sought in silence! Muggletonians found their own prophet--and Muggleton's story, like that of the arch-Ranter Clarkson, tells how a man who had rejected Calvinism, and who was therefore rejected by it, hunted through the sects for a spiritual home, another spiritual "nomad" seeking "a scratch for his itch."[2]

Lodowicke Muggleton

In order to discern more clearly a frame of mind which Muggleton suggests was quite common, it will be worth our while here to review a few representative passages from his

---

[1] Their founder, John Pordage (b. 1607) is mentioned in the Encyl. Britt. as a member of the Cambridge Platonistic circle.

[2] The list of sects, and their concepts of salvation is a long one. Whiting, op. cit., p. 233, points out that it is difficult to know how many sects there were, perhaps 160 or 170 of them! Apart from Baptists and Independents, Whiting actually describes 36.

IV27 Acts of the Witnesses which was published as an apologia pro vita sua in 1699, the year following the end of his very long life.[1]

Muggleton was a pawnbroker making a decent living. He gave up this usurious occupation at the instigation of William Reeve, "a zealous Puritan," and his friends who persuaded him of the dangers of hell: ". . . for I was extremely fearful of eternal Damnation; thinking my Soul might go into Hell Fire without a Body, as all People did at that time."[2]

Muggleton here made a real moral choice between God and Mammon: it was a true sacrificial conversion: "For I was exceedingly fearful of Hell and eternal Damnation: The very Thoughts of it made my Spirit many times fail within me."[3] He continues by saying that he thought that millions of souls were in Hell Fire without bodies . . . and that the Devil was a bodily Spirit. In echoing St. Paul he records that though he sincerely attempted to lead a righteous life, his righteousness did not cast out his fear of hell, and comments that "we Puritans being Pharasaically minded, were zealous of outward appearance. . . ." His implication is that "righteousness" was but outward: he was not nourished inwardly by an

---

[1] He was born in 1609, and founded his sect in c. 1651.

[2] Acts of the Witnesses, p. 10.

[3] Ibid., p. 12.

IV28 experience of sanctification. His Puritan faith meant to him self-doubt and fear of hell.

This spiritual insecurity was aggravated by the violence of the politico-religious turmoil, the insecurity of the State, and the contentions of the religions. Unsure as he was of his Christian hope, trembling as he was for his salvation, he, and others like him, were ready to be moved by every blast of vain doctrine. While recording that Puritans mostly supported Parliament, he says that,

> . . . most of my Society and Acquaintance in Religion, did fall away from that Way we did use, and declined in Love one towards another: and every one got a new Judgment, and a new Acquaintance, and a new Discipline. Some of them turned to Presbytery . . . and some turned Independents . . . others fell to be Ranters, and some fell to be meer Atheists.[1]

Now he comments on those who had been like himself "zealous before towards God, and Righteousness towards Man" that they had "left that Zeal, and turned Ranters, not only in Judgment, but in practice, to the destruction both of Soul and Body."

Muggleton was in the depths of spiritual misery like the others who had lost their confidence in God and God's mercy:

> When I saw this, that neither the Righteous could find Peace in the days of their Righteousness, but were afraid of Hell, nor those that turned from their Righteousness to actual Wickedness, I thought I must needs go to Hell.[2]

---

[1] Ibid., p. 16.

[2] Ibid., p. 18.

IV29 The loss of his hope shook Muggleton's belief in God as did the similar loss in others: "Many of my Acquaintance did say in their Hearts, and Tongues both, That there is no God, but Nature only." But Muggleton says that he could not see how Nature could have made itself. He was unconvinced by this staple of Ranter belief, and yet he could not find his way back to the fearful God he had lost or abandoned. Further, he came to doubt that there was life after death.

Muggleton proved to be a stronger soul than some of his acquaintance for this fear and doubting did not lead him to moral collapse. Virtue, he was convinced, was worth possessing even if there were no God to reward it or to punish the breach thereof. "I was resolved," he says, "to keep it to the End, if there were nothing after Death. . . . For I never had no guilt of actual sin."[1]

We shall return again to Muggleton but our brief references to him here serve to enlighten us concerning the type of emotional reaction to Puritan preaching of Hell-fire and Judgment which seems to have been not uncommon. Of course, Muggleton's own quest for security was rewarded by the revelation to him of a "six-foot God," a God with a body like ours.[2] Such a God, a complete contrast to the God of

---

[1] *Ibid.*; We notice that Muggleton was in fear of hell even though he "never had no Guilt of actual sin." It is indicative of a state of mind which seems to have been widespread.

[2] Like the God of the Mormon Joseph Smith.

IV30 Calvinism, was not strange and aweful . . . and Muggleton enjoyed the status of being his Lord's Chief Prophet!

It is, then, against the backdrop of the loss of confidence, or the threat of it, that we should regard the mid-seventeenth century stress on divine immanence and the emergence of those cults which embodied this features. To summarize the main causes of this insecurity and the consequent widespread melancholia, we may list the following points, though not necessarily in order of importance: First, the broken and confused condition of ecclesiastical authority; the ensuing doubt as to the existence of a transcendent Truth of which the Church had once been the proclaimer with a single voice; then, there were questionings about the authority and the truth of the Bible which was the heir of the dependence hitherto placed upon the Church's inspired tradition; the loss of the cornerstone of State Authority in the execution of the King in 1649, and the subsequent internecine fighting of power-groups; fear and guilt engendered by Calvinistic preaching of Predestination not only to Heaven, but to Condemnation and Hell; widespread belief in the decay of the world; the new astronomy which not only undermined confidence in the Bible but also called man's place in the universe into question.[1]

---

[1] Burton in his Anatomy of Melancholy (1621) wrote:

> But who shall dwell in these vast bodies, Earths, Worlds "if they be inhabited? rational creatures?" as Kepler demands, "or have they souls to be saved? or do they inhabit a better part of the world than we do? Are we or they Lords of the World? And how are all things made for man?"

IV31 One can see the appeal of Boehme's teaching. His cosmogony was exciting and interesting, and, in being mystically revealed, possessed a special authority. It further had the merit that it was inviolable to the inroads of scientific discovery. It expressed fairly the truth of human experience in the world. It presented, in the Ungrund, a notion of Divinity which was acceptable to persons tempted by traditional theology to fall into agnosticism and atheism. It looked evil in the face and yet provided a way of salvation: its fatalism was undercut by a quasi-metaphysical notion of "Faith" worked in the passive soul by God; its ideas were easily adaptable to the many eclectic teachings of the day. Boehme was something of a religious genius.

Everard, Boehme, and Sterry together provide us with a fair picture of the main features of the immanentalist movement illustrating its tendency towards pantheism and its devaluation of the world, to passivity, and to its puritanical depreciation of the body. They provide doctrines such as those of the essential unreality of evil, the responsibility of God for it in any case, and the divine ground of the soul--doctrines which were very comforting for troubled men. We shall find these doctrines very much present in the arch-Ranter writings which we shall shortly consider.

Taken from Part II, Sec. ii, Mem. 3. Kepler's dates were 1571-1630. His work was widely known by the sixteen-twenties.

IV32 Everard and Boehme were contemporaries and the latter may have influenced the former to some degree. Everard's conception of God's pouring his Being into things is quite close to Boehme's, though in other respects, the two men think quite differently. This is especially noticeable not only in minor things such as Boehme's elaborate Paracelsian symbolism, but in major things such as the Work of Christ. As we have seen, Everard accepted the traditional doctrine of Christ's sacrificial offering, with the caveat that, to be effective in the lives of individuals, the Passion had to be re-lived. The stress in Boehme is quite different for he balances an emphasis on the ethical against one on the metaphysical rather as Sterry does after him. This is really to be expected in a system which accepts the presence of evil as a necessary adjunct of goodness, a scheme which, perceiving the manifestation of Being in pairs of opposites, is dialectical in character.[1] In Boehme, after the disruption of the world's harmony through Adam's fall, Christ was sent down as an incarnation of the principle of Light so that he might "enter with the souls into the essence of God through the fire of eternal nature . . . and break a path for our souls through death and wrath, so that we might enter with Him through death into divine life."[2] Boehme's

---

[1] Cp. Myst. Mag., viii, 27.

[2] This passage is reminiscent of Athanasius' De Incarnatione Verbi Dei and indeed is taken from Boehme's work to which this same title has been given. It is quoted here from

IV33 conception of Christ as the Light of Lights which vanquishes Darkness is the familiar one of St. John's Gospel. It should never be supposed that Boehme's dialectical view of divine history is novel. What is novel is his own form of pantheistic *doctrine* derived from his immanental experience. It is important to be aware of this distinction. No one has a pantheistic experience. What one may have is an experience of immanence, and this may be so strong that it gives a sense of a pervading Unity. *Reflection* upon this experience may give birth to a doctrine of pantheism--not only that divinity lies in all things but that all things are divine, that Nature bursts forth from the pullulating and quickening divine Power as its direct expression: "Once as I came to Aiyaru, with light and reverent tread,/I saw come two young elephants, male by loved female led,/And in that sight I saw God's foot, saw secret things unsaid."[1] So that Nature is the Expression of the Divine, the Face of God:

> Up, up the long, delirious, burning blue
> I've topped the windswept heights with easy grace
> Where never lark or even eagle flew;
> And when with quiet, uplift mind I've trod
> The high unbroken canopies of space,
> Put out my hand and touched the face of God.[2]

Thune, *op. cit.*, p. 28. It should be noted that the Latin names of Boehme's works were applied by his followers. It seems likely, therefore, that others, too, have noticed the patristic source of Boehme's teaching here.

[1] A Hindu *bhakti* verse quoted from R.C. Zaehner, *Hinduism* (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), p. 174.

[2] Verse by a World War II "Spitfire" Pilot.

IV34 These verses, poor poetry as they are, tingle with the enchantment of the Holy--not now felt in its terrible aspect but as "fascinans." They are not in any sense doctrinal. They express feeling. They express not "rational piety" derived from doctrine, but rapture. The divine power is burgeoning, and blossoms forth into the beauty of the world. One senses this mood very powerfully in Sterry, and at times in Boehme, who, true to form, balances it against his experience of the "Dreadful."

In this experience of God in Nature, God is not in any way limited by Nature: it is but the expression of the divine. A doctrine developed from this experience is likely to be an idealistic pantheism or panentheism. Its mood is optimism: it breathes confidence and instills trust.[1] Such may transcend even a doctrine of unfree will, as we have seen in both Boehme and Sterry.

In Boehme we have a good example of an intense religious experience associated with pantheism. But pantheism, which is a doctrine, cannot give birth to that experience which generates the doctrine itself and infuses it with life. A doctrine without a spirit is a miserable husk: cracking upon the shell will deliver no sweet kernel to the mouth. A doctrine unnourished by spirit can generate only speculation and will lead to exaggerations uninhibited by the test of

---

[1] Traherne provides an excellent example of this; Cp. Jones, Spiritual Reformers, pp. 329-330.

IV35 experience. This is the case of the pantheistic doctrine of the arch-Ranter Jacob Bauthumley who, while leaning heavily upon Boehme's doctrine, is deficient of the generative experience.

Reflection upon the immanentalistic experience, then, may, and often does, lead to a doctrine of idealistic pantheism. Such a doctrine, as we have now noted several times, tends to deplete the idea of progressive history, and of time itself, because it deprives both of any independent reality. This tendency is present even in Everard and Boehme. Everard is too shrill when he expostulates that "those things were All, Actually, and Really done in the flesh . . .," that he was not making "all the Scripture a Fable . . .," and that he was "willing to stake his life that those things were Externally and Literally acted." He is replying to criticisms, unmentioned, that this is, in fact, what he is doing. Boehme likewise tries to preserve a sense of the reality of history and of time but rather unsuccessfully. His eschatology is in the realm of the mythical, for Time, as we know it, belongs only to this fallen elemental world, the world of Adam--Boehme is not at all sure to what it is leading. He is hesitant and dubious about the meaning of the General Resurrection and of the Millennium. He is "opposed in principle to the thought of a millennium on earth because it is not consistent with his speculative scheme."[1] In other words, it is apparent that

---

[1] Cp. Thune, op. cit., p. 32.

IV36 Boehme, like Everard, would like to make positive affirmations about history and time but does not know how to do so. Sterry, having read, marked, learned, and inwardly digested Boehme came also to a rather negative conclusion, as we have seen. Of course, Boehme emphasized a pantheistic difficulty which makes his attempt more difficult: he stressed evil's place in history's dialectic. This is all very well in a book but it is hard to live with. It is hard to give meaning to history, which is to say that it is hard to give meaning to life, when one believes that deformity, idiocy, disease, and violent death are of divine origin and have--to put it rather simply--God's approbation. What becomes of the Theological Virtues then?

In a time of pessimism pantheistic doctrine may be seen as confirming the darker side of life's experience. With anguish a man will realize that the Divine is not, then, greater than evil, and not its Conqueror, not even potentially! The Divine is not, then the Ruler of Nature; it is Nature only. Nature rules all things: all things are made by Nature. Here, we have arrived at a thorough-going materialistic pantheism. God exists in the creatures and nowhere else, the belief that was condemned in the "Blasphemy Bill" of 1650. As for man, what of him? Is he not as the beasts that perish? Can they be less divine than he? Is he more divine than they? Is not the testimony of Ecclesiastes the Preacher the eternal verity? Ranters and especially Jacob Bauthumley, drew this conclusion, and it is

IV37 not difficult to trace out the path that led to their melancholy outlook. We can see now that materialistic pantheism as we see it in seventeenth-century England is a pessimistic doctrine in essence. In this particular instance it is differentiated in its implications from idealistic pantheism. The latter derives from a lively and hopeful immanental experience; the former from despair.

It is a true comedy that whereas the conditions which caused widespread loss of confidence gave a stimulus to "inward religion" as a remedy, the latter, developing in a pantheistic form, is sometimes transformed by those same conditions into a doctrine of pessimism and even of despair. This could not have happened if "inward religion" had not abandoned its hold upon the Christian tradition of objective salvation based in a belief in the reality of Time as the scene of divine creativity and purpose; but it was encouraged to do so by the Platonistic tradition in its various manifestations. We have endeavored so far in the course of these chapters to suggest those elements in mid-seventeenth century English thought which contributed to this pessimistic frame of mind.

Summary and Conclusion

Thus we see in Boehme's teaching a God who is, in essence, beyond personality. "Love" is an ambivalent term when used of that which is beyond classification. The ground of being is beyond petition, untouchable by human sorrow.

IV38 Man can do nothing but hang on by the tenuous thread of faith.

As for evil, it is the counterpart of good, and a man, confronted by and involved in the struggle of titanic cosmic forces can do naught but lie low in passive submission, but reposing confidence in the knowledge that his inner self is divine. If he is to be saved, God will do it. The Christian notions of sin and of hell are thoroughly subjectivised, and a man learns that sin is a regrettable subjective state, the consequence of a false imagination. Boehme's horror of sex and the body will lead a disciple to regard the flesh, like the Gnostics, with disgust, and the notion of the subjectivity of sin might well lead him to regard the body's dishonor with equanimity.

Boehme is a pantheist in theory but a dualist in feeling. In the Divine, Boehme gazes steadfastly at the Dark--the dreadfulness of the mysterium tremendum. He sets forth, in unforgettable imagery, the horror of the Holiness of God and of His Wrath, reinforcing that same emphasis found in Luther and Calvin. In immanentalism's "sweet sense of divine Love" we see a reaction to this.

This extremely strong emphasis on God's Holiness, His Wrath, His Judgment, and upon Hellfire tended to undermine confidence in an age when security was hard to find, leading to an increase in sectarianism and to atheism. Muggleton's acquaintance said, "There is no God but Nature only." We thus see the link between pessimism and materialistic pantheism.

IV39 We notice that Christian soteriology in Boehme continues the trend found in other forms of inward religion, namely, that salvation is metaphysical rather than ethical, and this is reflected in a very hesitant view of the direction and purpose of history.

Of the four arch-Ranters whom we shall consider, only one can justly be called a "Ranting Behmenist," and that is Jacob Bauthumley. But strong echoes of Behmenism can be detected from time to time in the writings of all these leaders. We shall endeavor to point these out as we come to elucidate their writings.

* * * * *

There remains one further element to be exposed before we comment on the four writers who represent Ranterism, and that is the phenomenon of antinomianism. This was a movement deeply rooted in troubled consciences and represented an attempt to find serenity. While finding some success, its deeply ambivalent character may have aggravated in some cases the complaint that it was meant to cure.

CHAPTER V

ANTINOMIANISM

Introduction

Certainly, the most spectacular feature of Ranterism was its blatant antinomianism. We have noticed that it caused considerable public excitement. In this chapter it is proposed mainly to explore two aspects of this phenomenon, namely, the antinomianism of free-grace, and the antinomianism of mystical regeneration or deification. The remaining type, the antinomianism of pantheism, will be dealt with in the concluding chapters where we shall make some Ranter case-studies. Jacob Bauthumley and Abiezer Coppe include free-grace antinomianism among their teachings; Joseph Salmon may well have taught the antinomianism of mystical regeneration together with Coppe; Laurence Clarkson, following tendencies also to be found in Bauthumley, preached pantheistic antinomianism.

In this present chapter, however, we shall not study the Ranters themselves, but those personages who prepared the way for Ranter attitudes, namely, Wm. Perkins, Tobias Crispe, John Saltmarsh, and John Eaton. We know of a direct connection between these persons and Ranters only in the case of Crispe and Clarkson, but, in any case, these men epitomize the factors at work in the Ranter conscience.

V2 As we remarked in the introduction to our third chapter, there is to be found among the sects, as well as among the Ranters, a confused confluence of pneumatic enthusiasm (of the Biblical tradition), and mystical illuminism to which belongs mystical regeneration. Free-grace antinomianism and the antinomianism of mystical regeneration derive from these two traditions, intertwined and convoluted. For example, Randall the Familist was yet a disciple of Crispe who was a free-gratianist, and Saltmarsh likewise straddles the two traditions.

This fusing together of elements is not surprising, however, since the free-grace antinomian movement, like that of "inward religion," was in essence a protest against "outward," formal religion--against legalism. This protest is natural both to recipients of free spirit and to those of inward illumination. While it is not to be forgotten that exponents of the legal doctrine of free justification taught the subsequent sanctifying of the soul by the Spirit, it is plain that this important Christian doctrine often received somewhat scanty treatment in much Puritan preaching of our period. Hence the gospel protest, "Not Law but Grace!"

In their pristine positions, then, the protests made in the name of free-grace and of inward religion simply demanded that piety and inward dedication--not outward conformity to Law--should be the mark of the Christian. As such, the protests were unexceptionable. But it is apparent

V3 from the attitude of Parliament, and from other contemporary comment, that in some places it was freedom from Law, not inward piety, that was being stressed. Injudicious men could not maintain the nice balance between these elements, and men who could not comprehend the theological notion of antinomianism or its spiritual values, but saw only a call to license, speedily brought the whole movement into disrepute.

To conclude this introduction, let it be pointed out that the root of that antinomianism which we shall study in this chapter lies in an intense awareness of sin. The intensity of this awareness seems often to have bordered on neurosis, and antinomianist theory, as well as practice, seems sometimes only to have aggravated this condition further.

Let us now begin with a reference to Jno. Eaton's famous "Honeycombe."

> Paul *reproving* Peter *in the face of the Congregation, hath here no trifling in hand*, but the chiefest article of all Christian Doctrine; the Majestie and Utilitie whereof, who so rightly esteemeth, to him all other things shall seeme but vile, and nothing worth: For what is Peter? what is Paul? what is an Angell from heaven? what are all creatures to the Article of Free Justification? which if we know then are we in the *cleer* light: But if we be ignorant thereof, then are we in most miserable darknes.
>
> Dr. Luther in Galath. 2,11.

---

[1] John Eaton, *The Honeycombe of Free Justification* (London, 1642). This quotation appears on the title page.

V4 In modern times the movement called antinomianism dates from Martin Luther's collaborator, John Agricola. In a word, his teaching was that Christians are freed from the demands of the Mosaic Law by God's grace freely given.[1] The good life is derived from the inner workings of the Holy Spirit and not from obedience to any authority. Antinomians, following Agricola, appealed to Augustine and Luther, but primarily to Paul.

Of course, in their appeal to Paul, modern antinomians were not original: they were preceded by antinomian Christians of the first century. That Paul himself indignantly rejected what he regarded as a perversion of his teaching[2] did not solve the problems caused by what he had clearly said in his preaching and letters. For he had given out, in fact, that we are not under Law but under Grace; that it is a man's _faith_ that is reckoned to him by God for righteousness; that a man is justified by faith apart from the works of the Law;[3] that God will not reckon sin to the blessed man whom He accounts righteous. This justification is made possible for men by the shedding of Christ's blood[4]

---

[1] One of Agricola's most famous utterances was, "The Decalogue belongs in the court-house, not in the pulpit. . . . To the gallows with Moses!"

[2] Cp. for example, Paul, _Epistle to the Romans_, 3:8; 6:1; 6:15.

[3] _Ibid_., 3:28; 4:5-6; 6:14.

[4] _Ibid_., 5:9.

V5 who satisfied the Law on their behalf; the work of sanctification, however, which follows upon justification is the work of the Spirit transforming a man inwardly "from glory to glory." The liberty of a justified man is moreover reinforced by his possession of the Spirit, for therein, he possesses the Spirit's liberty also.[1] Thus, in order to be both justified, sanctified, and set free, a man, as one of the ungodly, has but to believe that Christ died for him.

How, then, does a man acquire this saving faith? The answer might be expressed, "through Grace," or more fully, "through predestination," for: ". . . whom He foreknew he also foreordained . . . and whom He foreordained, them He also called; and whom He called, them He also justified; and whom He justified, them He also glorified."[2]

It may be deduced, therefore, that the work of salvation is God's, and His alone. He has decided, before all worlds, who is and who is not, to be saved. A man's role may be construed to be a passive one: he may rest quiet in his assurance.

On the other hand, it could be argued that if a man were to be a recipient of grace he had to show need of it. After all, Paul had said that "the free gift (of justification) came of many trespasses . . ." and that "the Law

---

[1] Cp. *Ibid*., 8:1-2; *II Cor*. 3:17-18.

[2] *Romans* 8:29-30.

V6 came in beside that the trespass might abound, but where sin abounded, grace did much more abound." It was no wonder, then, that some said, "Let us sin that grace may abound."[1] Hence springs active, not passive antinomianism.

Paul no doubt thought that he was misunderstood out of sheer perversity. It seems likely that he was at least partly correct in this, but we cannot be sure that it is the whole explanation. Some people really are very simple and can easily be misled by forceful, perhaps headstrong, teachers, or merely by their own stupidity. It is possible, then, that they were misled by Paul's extreme language--a common fault of convinced and powerful preachers. For example, did he *really* wish that Jewish teachers of circumcision should emasculate themselves? Or did Jesus *really* mean that we should hate our nearest and dearest in order to qualify for heaven? And did Luther, deducing from Scripture that God seeks *sinners* rather than godly men, *really* mean what he said when he told Melanchthon to "sin boldly?" Such an expression might be thought to be a slip of the pen--the tongue of the ready writer--but Luther reinforces his dictum, as Paul reinforced his, over and over again. Says Luther, commenting on *Galatians* 1:4: "Christ was given not for feigned or fictitious sins, but for real ones; not for little sins, but for huge ones; not for this

---

[1] *Ibid*., 6:1; 6:15.

V7 sin or that sin, but for all sins. . . . Unless you are found in the number of those who say: 'For our sins' there is no salvation for you." Gerrish comments, "Here is heaven's thunder against all "righteousnesses": the sinner has hope precisely because of his sin."[1] But Luther's message of hope became for some the signal for libertinism, or at least provided a reinforcement for libertine antinomian tendencies already present in the underground Spiritual movements of his time.[2]

A belief which saw development in the course of Christian history, and which is not clearly in evidence in the New Testament is that the Elect, being both justified and filled with Spirit were *not able* to sin. The idea associates itself with that of mystical regeneration or deification of the believer. This compound belief appears prominently in the doctrine of a group of movements antecedent to the Anabaptist and Familist movements, that is, among the

---

[1] Cp. Gerrish, *Grace and Reason: A Study in the Theology of Luther* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962), pp. 114-116.

[2] Calvin writes against them in his *Contre la secte Phantastique et Furieuse des Libertins que se nomment Spirituels* (1575). Cf. N. Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millenium* (London: Oxford University Press, 1957), p. 179 *et passim*; also, R. Bainton, "The Left Wing of the Reformation," in *Journal of Religion* XXI (April, 1941), 124-134. The doubt expressed by F. Vernet in the *Dictionaire de Théologie Catholique* (Paris, 15 vols., 1903-1950), Vol. vi, Cols. 800-809, that Amaury of Bena should be regarded as their eponymous ancestor is echoed by Cohn, *op. cit*., p. 158.

V8 Brethren of the Free Spirit.[1] It is an attractive doctrine of which hints can be observed over a widely scattered area of sectarian life: we have noticed it in one form in the Familists; we saw it as alleged Ranter doctrine in our first chapter, and we shall find it in the Ranter writings. It is a belief which though negative and passive in form comes to be associated with positive and active manifestations.

The negative form of antinomianism may be seen in the "Gottesfreunde" or "Friends of God" who, influenced by Eckhart, Tauler, and Suso, emphasized the transforming personal union of their souls with God. Stressing the divine indwelling within, they were inclined to pantheism. The *Theologia Germanica*--a favorite book of Luther's and which, translated by Everard, had great influence on inward religion in England--came from these circles. The Friends of God came under criticism for saying that, because of the liberty of the Holy Spirit, they need no longer mortify

---

[1] Cp. Cohn, *op. cit.*, *passim*; Cf. Knox, *Enthusiasm* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1950), p. 87. The reader will recall that this belief occurred also in Molinos. It is conceivable that this type of belief has some dependence on the teaching in I John 3:9 that the spiritually regenerate cannot sin because God's "seed abides in him." This is a mystical doctrine of rebirth, not a legal doctrine of justification. But in the period in which our study is set there was a constant running together of doctrines in a very uncritical fashion, and the sects were much inclined to mystical doctrines. In a confused way it might be felt that mystical regeneration and legal justification were essentially the same thing! Either doctrine could result in antinomian tendencies.

V9 themselves after Christ's example, nor rule themselves by the ink and paper of the Holy Scripture.[1] There is no suggestion, however, ~~that~~ they were actively antinomian or libertine. And this in spite of such seductive suggestions as Tauler's, ". . . in the hidden undifferentiated darkness of the undifferentiated Good, the spirit is led so near to the unity of God that it loses all distinctions."[2] The neo-Platonist scheme which we have noticed so many times in our study is here again in evidence, and the flavor of this utterance reminds one of Boehme. The "Mystical doctrine of passive deification" is represented even in the main stream of Reformation thought as, for example, in the theology of Münzer.[3]

Such antinomians as the Friends of God are designated "speculative antinomians" by Serge Hutin,[4] and are contrasted by him with "practical antinomians" of whom he sees the Ranters as a remarkable example. Huehns sees the Ranters as exemplifying the former and also points to the Ranters as an example of the latter.[5] Of course, the Brethren of the

---

[1] The attitude we noticed was imported into England by the Familists and perhaps also by others.

[2] Quoted by G. Huehns, Antinomianism in English History (London: Cresset Press, 1951), p. 29. It is taken from Tauler, Sermons (1508 ed.), sermon xv, p. 73.

[3] Cp. Troeltsch, The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches, tr. Olive Wyon (New York: Macmillan, 1931), vol. ii, p. 754.

[4] S. Hutin, Les Disciples Anglais de Jacob Boehme (Paris: Editions Denoel, 1960), p. 74.

[5] Huehns, op. cit., p. 109.

V10 Free Spirit as well as some of the Anabaptists, whom we noticed in an earlier chapter, also provide examples of "practical" antinomianism. In England further examples are provided by the Levellers, and in certain ways by the Quakers. But this is to draw attention to the fact that religious antinomianism had its political and ecclesiastical implications and effects, and it is not our intention to discuss these issues here.[1]

Now, having stated the main ideas of antinomianism, let us turn our attention to some of the specific manifestations of that movement in England.

* * * * *

In England, antinomianism was given an identity as a specific movement by 1636, having taken shape during Charles' "eleven years of tyranny."[2] Only in 1644, on 14th August, was the "order of the House of Commons read for the quelling of Antinomianism and Anabaptism."[3] The 20th November, 1646,

---

[1] On this point Cp. Huehns, op. cit., and in reference to the two movements specifically mentioned see G.H. Sabine, The Works of Gerrard Winstanley (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1941), to which Sabine has written a brilliant introduction; for the Quakers see Braithwaite, The Beginnings of Quakerism and The Second Period of Quakerism (Cambridge at the University Press, 2nd ed., 1961). For Puritan contribution to antinomianism in general, Cp. W. Haller, The Rise of Puritanism (New York: Columbia University Press, 1938), pp. 366-367, et passim.

[2] Cp. Huehns, op. cit., who quotes the State Papers Domestic Charles I, Vol. CCCXIV, No. 34, February 20, 1636.

[3] Huehns, op. cit., p. 81. The constant association of these two terms should be noted.

V11 saw an "ordinance against Heresie" which condemns the opinion that "the Morall Law . . . is no rule of a Christian life," and parts of the Act against blasphemy of 1648 are also directed against the movement:[1] the Act forbids the notion that "Revelations and the workings of the spirit are a rule of faith or of Christian life . . . or that the Morall Law of God contained in the 10 Commandments is no rule. . . ." By the time 1650 is reached a type of antinomianism new to England is made subject to legislative action, namely, that based upon pantheism.[2] It may be seen, therefore, that the term "antinomianism" (like the term "ranterism") covered a good deal of ground.

It is plain that even the antinomianism born of a doctrine of grace rather than of pantheism had reached a rather extreme position, at least in statement, when these provisions of 1644, 1646, and 1648 were enacted.[3] Official alarm, civil and ecclesiastical, had been aroused, and by 1645 the term "antinomian," having acquired a strong flavor of opprobrium, had become a great nuisance to preachers.

---

[1] The Act of 1648; Cp. Scobell, Collection of Acts, 1648, Cap.114, p. 150.

[2] Cp. the Act of August 9, 1650, quoted in our first chapter, p. 59.

[3] Huehns, op. cit., p. 114, confuses the issue by associating together passages from these three acts. She makes this possible by her quotations in which the words referring to materialistic pantheism in the Ordinance of 1650 are omitted thereby making it appear to refer to the common immanentalistic position. Her motivations for this are not clear.

V12 John Saltmarsh--certainly a mere speculative antinomian if ever there was one--protests about the use of the word as a label for those preaching the Biblical doctrine of "free-grace" in his book of that title and of that year.[1] The authorities were unlikely to search out the sometimes subtle differences between that antinomianism accentuating justification, that which emphasized the indwelling of, and the liberty of, the Spirit, and that which stressed mystical deification or pantheism. To alarmed ears it all sounded the same whether the sound and fury signified something or nothing, and all antinomians, however much they resisted, were tarred with the same brush. The events leading to the "Act for suppressing the detestable sins of Incest, Adultery, and Fornication (10 May, 1650)" must have appeared to justify every fear of this potent Christian doctrine. Poor Saltmarsh is blamed by Richard Baxter as one of the prime sources of antinomianism which "led to the anarchy which presently ensued,"[2] and he is taken to task also in Thomas Edwards' Gangraena of 1646 to which he promptly replied.[3]

---

[1] J. Saltmarsh, Free Grace or, The Flowings of Christ's Blood freely to Sinners, Being an Experiment of Jesus Christ upon one who hath been in the bondage of a troubled Conscience at times, for the space of about twelve years. . . . (London, 1645); see Preface.

[2] R. Baxter, Richard Baxter's Confession (London, 1655), Preface, p. 4. He notes that Saltmarsh's Free Grace and other writings and preachings became exceedingly popular and were widely read.

[3] A whole sequence of publications followed of which a full account is given in Wm. Haller, Liberty and Reformation in the Puritan Revolution (New York: Columbia University Press, 1955), pp. 226 ff.

V13 It is not easy to say who was the founding father of English antinomianism since the doctrines are, in any case, rooted in Scripture and in the early history of Christianity. Pagitt, however, ascribes the honor to one John Eaton "the first Antinomian among us."[1] Eaton's book, The Honeycombe of Free Justification, published in 1642 after the author's death, is designated the fount of heresy.[2] Huehns follows Pagitt in this.[3] Whiting, however, designates Tobias Crispe as the originator.[4] He was admitted M.A. at Balliol, Oxford, in 1626, and died around 1643. In the early part of his ministry he was an Arminian. "He was extremely unguarded in his expressions, and his writings certainly do not show that he had any intention of defending licentiousness."[5] Two quotations will serve to epitomise Crispe's position--the quintessence of free-grace antinomianism. One is taken from his own writings and the other from a Welsh seventeenth-century commentator, Daniel Williams.

---

[1] Heresiography (1661), p. 121.

[2] See infra, and Cp. Haller, Rise of Puritanism, p. 213f, for a discussion of the leading ideas of the book. Other works of Eaton's are The Discovery of the most Dangerous Dead Faith (London, 1745), and Abraham's Steps of Faith (London, 1642). Cf. T. Gataker, God's Eye on his Israel, who on page 2 reports on the "Eatonists . . . Antinomians. . . ." This book has the printed date 1648 but Thomason has written 1644. None of Eaton's books was printed in his lifetime. Huehns, op. cit., p. 64, assumes that they circulated in MS because he was well-known to the authorities. He was deprived of his living in 1619.

[3] Huehns, op. cit., p. 47.

[4] Whiting, op. cit., p. 267.

[5] Dictionary of National Biography, "Crispe."

V14 First Crispe: "But some will object, Do not those that receive Christ, actually commit sin? I answer, Yea, they do commit sin, and the truth is, they can do nothing but commit sin."[1] This thoroughly Protestant and pessimistic attitude provides the emotional stimulus for Crispe's reaction:

> His scheme is this: That by God's mere electing decree, all saving blessings are by divine obligation made ours, and nothing more is needful to our title to these blessings. That on the Cross, all the sins of the elect were transferred to Christ, and ceased ever after to be their's. That at the first moment of conception a title to all those decreed blessings is applied to all the Elect, and they invested actually therein. Hence the Elect have nothing to do, in order to an interest in any of these blessings; nor ought they to intend the least good to themselves in what they do: Sin can do them no harm, because it is none of their's; nor can God afflict them for any sin.[2]

The discovery of divine free-grace in England, however, was not delayed until the sixteen-forties. The doctrine had been already expounded in the fifteen-eighties and earlier by the renowned theologian and preacher William Perkins. His wonderful lucidity in expounding subtle and difficult Christian doctrines gave him deserved fame. He was widely read at home and equally as widely on the Continent;[3] of his books Fuller remarks: ". . . it is a miracle almost to conceive how thick they lye."

---

[1] Crispe, Christ Alone Exalted (London, 1690), vol. i, p. 12.

[2] D. Williams, Gospel Truth Stated and Vindicated (London, 1692), re-issued London, 1830, pp. xi-xii.

[3] Cp. I. Breward, "The Significance of Wm. Perkins," Journal of Religious History IV, No. 2 (December, 1966), 113-128.

V15 Perkins was a convinced Calvinist and capable of precise forensic argument. He held that all men are predestined either to salvation or damnation ". . . only of God's good Will and Pleasure." His most famous book, in which he explores the implications of this doctrine, both theological and psychological--and the latter in a remarkable and sensitive way--is his A Golden Chain (unpaginated) published in 1591. Like Theodore Beza whom he admired, he does not shrink from extreme statement of the Calvinist creed, asserting that God is unconditioned Will and that all things exist by virtue of it. This is true even of evil. It is good that there should be evil, he argues, for it provides the occasion for divine Providence. So God has justly decreed the wicked works of the wicked. Some men are not destined to Salvation, and willy-nilly, they are damned. But others are unalterably destined to Life and Salvation, and these cannot fall: they be saved whether or not they be Holy. Justification cannot depend on sanctification. Opponents of this doctrine, he writes, "affirme that euerye mortall sinne extinguisheth grace, the which, if we may beleeve God's woord, is farre otherwise. . . . We being then iustified, we have peece with God (Rom. 5:1). Now how can this be true, if he, that is once iustified may fall from grace?" This is a consoling doctrine for the self-satisfied, but what of the others? For the sake of those who recognize no motions of grace in themselves Perkins "adioyned the Order which M. Theodore Beza used in comforting troubled consciences:" Perkins recognized

V16 the destructive effect of guilt for sin and fear of damnation.

Perkins did not believe that sin was "a corruption of man's substance, but only of his faculties: otherwise neither could mens soules be immortal, not Christ take upon him man's nature." This is meant to comfort those who, though numbered among the Elect, yet sinned and felt "some greeuous horror, and terror of the conscience," and who felt, as Cain, that "my punishment is greater than I can bear." The effect of actual sin on the mind, he points out, is to lead the sinner to imagine "that there is no God" and that "there is neither providence nor presence of God in the worlde." Perkins quotes the Psalmist: "He hath said in his hart God hath forgotten; he hideth his face and will never see." So, says Perkins, comes the sinner to a denial of hell and judgment. This lamentable state of affairs is aggravated by guilty fear, a disease of which the "symptoms . . . are blasphemies, trembling of the body, fearfull dreames . . . ." "The soule is punished with trebling [sic] of conscience, care, trouble, hardnes of hart, and madnes." And the result of this disturbance of heart and mind is "an inward rebellion, whereby (a man) vtterly abhorreth that which is good, desiring and willing that alone which is euill."

Such, Perkins sees, are the fearful results of sin, so that, subjectively, the case of the saved sinner may be no better than that of the damned. Perkins no doubt felt that his exposé of the psychology whereby sin led to guilt, and guilt to more sin, would have a remedial effect upon his readers, and in this he may have been right. Certainly the wide success which his work enjoyed must have owed something to his practical pastoral counseling, much needed in the realm of a theology which constantly hammered on "the horrible filthinesse of the least Sinne in the Sight of God."

Perkins, then, balances the doctrine of sin with the doctrine of grace. One demands the other if there is to be health in the mind and hope in the breast. Actually, the same elements can be found in Luther who says that, "We have no free will except for evil" but who at another time says, "God . . . promises that he will not ascribe to you the sins which are in your nature after baptism, and will not look upon them. . . ."[1] The grace of Baptism is the Christian's hope, and the advent of free-grace antinomianism in seventeenth-century England must be seen at least in part as a reaction against the paralysing overstress on the power of sin in Puritan preaching. Equally, the rise of Arminianism--reflecting the growing humanism of the day--must be seen as a protest of Christian humanism against Calvinist denial of human free-will.

There is no need here to undertake a recapitulation of the entire development of free-grace antinomianism in

---

[1] Cp. Huehns, op. cit., p. 31.

V18 England.[1] It will suffice us to mention the main ideas of John Eaton's Honeycombe before going on to those of John Saltmarsh.

Eaton, like Everard, taught a doctrine of universal grace--a doctrine which is antinomian initially because it denies the importance of the ecclesia and the ministry.[2] The multiplication of sects and gospels had already widely undermined the traditional doctrine of the Church whether as the "Ark of Salvation" or as Christ's "Mystical Body" and it must occasion no surprise that a doctrine of grace should emerge which found ecclesiastical organisms superfluous. Eaton, sensible of the outpouring of the Spirit and grace upon men, believed that if they must become like little children in order to inherit God's kingdom and theirs, then the true understanding of the Gospel must require, not

---

[1] Readers desiring this should consult Haller, The Rise of Puritanism, Chapter 5. There are also sundry references in the same author's Liberty and Reformation. Huehns, op. cit., who covers the movement from 1640-1660 also provides an unusually full guide to the original literature. Cf. Leo Solt, "William Dell: New Model Army Chaplain," CQR, Vol. CLV (January-March, 1954), 443-455.

[2] In a sense, all groups founded in "inward" and "mystical" religion are antinomian since they abjure the authority of the official church and substitute their own inspiration for it. E.g., S. Rutherford, in his Survey of the Spirituall Antichrist (London, 1647), p. 345, groups H.N. together with Dell, Saltmarsh, Towne, Eaton, Den, Crispe as "scandalous Antinomians." Cf. Wm. Walwyn, The Compassionate Samaritane (1644) where he challenges ecclesiastical authority, the jus divinum, in the Ministry. If all men who so desired were saved by grace (a common belief) what need of the Ministry? Cp. Haller, Liberty and Reformation, pp. 162-165.

V19 learning and intellect, but only an open heart. "Learning cannot reach it, Wisdome is offended, Nature is astonied. . . ."[1] The mystery of faith lies at the heart of Eaton's teaching. The mystical element within antinomianism is already apparent. A note of ecstasy is constantly heard, ringing through the noise of antinomianism's quarrel with her enemies. Eaton knows, and joyfully proclaims, that God's free gift of Justification is available to all, and not merely to a few elect ones. Men need no more tremble before God's fearful Wrath, for "all anger and enmity is utterly abolished from between God and you, and you are set in the compleat love, perfect peace, and full fervour of God again."[2] In spite of all the troubles which the Devil or the World may bring upon the faithful and redeemed, their heart may "laugh and leap for holy joy in God, being voyd of all care and trouble, and be made above measure confident."[3]

The antinomianism of free-grace enjoyed great success in the New Model Army: it was of the same inward spirit as the aspirations toward individualism and democracy now powerfully in evidence. Two of the best known antinomian preachers were army chaplains of great popularity, William

---

[1] Eaton, Honeycombe, p. 4.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 411.

[3] *Ibid.*, p. 467.

V20 Dell and John Saltmarsh.[1] The latter has been described as a "strange genius, part poet and part whirling dervish . . . the most brilliant of the early exponents of Puritan mysticism and of the doctrine of the brotherhood of man. . . ."[2]

Saltmarsh was a northerner, born in Yorkshire in 1612, and went up to Magdalene College, Cambridge about 1629. Perhaps it was there that the seeds of mystical religion were planted in his breast to flower after several dormant years. He was something of a poet--Haller describes him as a metaphysical poet--but produced a splendid book of mystical devotion in 1640, his Holy Discoveries and Flames. He dedicated it to the King. By 1646, however, he was a chaplain to Fairfax's army. It was between 1644 and his death in 1647 at the early age of 35 that he produced most of his writings.

Holy Discoveries and Flames seeks to kindle the flame of devotion and love in its readers: the heart "must not be

---

[1] Readers who are especially interested in Dell should consult not only Leo F. Solt's article already cited but also Theodor Sippell's William Dells Programm (Tübingen, 1911), name of publisher unobtainable. Another antinomian who was an army chaplain was Wm. Erbury (a friend of Christopher Love) whose book The Testimony of Wm. Erbury was published posthumously in 1658. Edwards mentions him in the Gangraena (1646), pp. 62 and 78. He is said to have become a Seeker, to have taught universal redemption, to have denied original sin, and Christ's divinity. His widow, Dorcas, was in 1656 arrested for paying divine honours to Jas. Nayler who she said had raised her from the dead. Baxter considered Erbury a leading Anabaptist, and Neale describes him as a turbulent antinomian.

[2] Cp. Haller, Rise of Puritanism, pp. 79 and 213.

V21 barely enlightened, but enflamed." In it Saltmarsh discourses on the theme of universal love. He pleads for toleration, especially for religious toleration. As to his ideas in general, Haller comments:

> As Baxter, and more particularly, as Rutherford with tireless pedantry, did not fail to set forth, there could be no mistaking the antecedents of Saltmarsh's ideas. . . . They were in line with the *Theologia Germanica* and the sixteenth-century continental mystics, with Henry Nicholas and the Familists, and with such English preachers as John Everard and Giles Randall . . . and John Eaton. . . .[1]

"In other words, there was in his thought a confluence of the streams of 'mystical regeneration' and 'free (but legal) justification'."

Baxter expressed his distress at the success of Saltmarsh's *Free Grace* (which, in a curious conflation of title and sub-title he calls *Flowings of Grace*) noting that it was "exceedingly taking both in Countrey and in the Army . . . especially when I saw how greedily multitudes of poor souls did take the bait, and how exceedingly the Writings and Preachings of *Saltmarsh* and many of his fellows did take with them."[2]

Saltmarsh seems to have received his New Birth with great spiritual consolation in 1640 after which he published his *Holy Discoveries and Flames* but his feelings of misery at

---

[1] Haller, *Liberty and Reformation*, p. 198.

[2] *Richard Baxter's Confession* (1655), p. 4; Cp. Haller, *op. cit.*, p. 198.

V22 his sinful condition do not seem to have much abated until he was captivated by the gospel of "Free Grace . . . an experiment of Jesus Christ upon one who hath been in bondage of a troubled Conscience at times, for the space of about twelve years. . . ."[1] And even then, as a "justified sinner," he thought of himself as an unlovable and corrupted creature:

> . . . how can we think *God* who is infinitely pure . . . can love a *sinner* as a *sinner*? . . . But what is there in a man faln, and corrupted, for *God* to love or delight in . . .? Therefor God must from *meer grace* more properly then *love*, order some *righteousnesse* or *new glory* for man; in which, he may beautifie, adorn, and love him.[2]

God is unsearchable, he says, and reveals himself to man in goodness and free-grace.

The tone of this book is very Pauline--from the lamentations on his own spiritual state and his discourses on the sterility of law, to ecstatic outbursts about "A Believers glorious freedom." "The Spirit of Christ sets a beleever as free from Hell, the Law and bondage here on Earth, as if he were in Heaven."[3] He quotes: ". . . Romans, 8:33: *We are not under the Law but under grace: Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is Christ who died*. . . . A justified person is a perfect person;" he is as pure in God's sight as the righteousness of Christ can make him.[4]

---

[1] *Free Grace* (1645), title page.

[2] *Ibid*., p. 113.

[3] *Ibid*., p. 140.

[4] *Ibid*., pp. 128-129.

V23 Like William Perkins, he says: "If you suppose that God takes in any part of your _faith_, _repentence_, or _new obedience_, or _sanctification_ as a ground upon which he _justifies_ or _forgives_ you, you are clear against the Word."[1] While he stands by this forthright declaration yet he makes justification conditional upon one thing, and that is _the act of believing_ that one has been saved by Christ. This makes it appear that Saltmarsh is a believer in free-will, a disciple of Arminius. Certainly it is very easy to gain this impression from the general tone of his statements but, whatever his inner tendencies, such a belief was impossible for one who believed so wholly in the complete domination of the world by the sovereign Will of God, and, indeed, he seeks to vindicate himself from this "scandalous aspersion," as he calls it.

Antinomianism, as we have before noted, is a very broad term covering those who will not conform to civil state doctrines, or ecclesiastical directives, as well as pantheistic antinomians and spirit-filled antinomians. We noted that the latter tend to be at least closely allied to justified-by-free-grace antinomians. The relationship between the two appears at first sight to be a matter of justification first and spiritual charisma second. But this proves to be in error for we find that the "faith unto justification of life"

---

[1] _Ibid_., p. 82.

V24 is given by grace and Spirit according to God's predestination. In fact, the Spirit establishes the Law. That the antinomian teaching of Free Justification is actually a strongly legalistic conception was noted by Samuel Rutherford who delights to point out that "to preach the Gospel to sinners, and for Saltmarsh to write a booke of free-grace, is a legall straine of teaching."[1] Of course, he was right! The stress of this antinomian movement was on the Work of Christ rather than on that of the Spirit, on justificatory merit rather than on regeneration. The free-grace antinomian position was that the demands of the Law had been met, and not that the Law had been abrogated. As in Paul's mentality, the necessity of Law, and its rights, are unquestioned and unquestionable. These antinomians, like most of their contemporaries, were habituated to Law: they had a "legall conscience." But they themselves could not construe their doctrine "a legall straine of teaching" because they set their transfixed gaze beyond the Law and on to God's unaccountable mercy--not upon his love but upon his grace, as Saltmarsh expresses it in his unintentionally illuminating comment. Law, then, is not abrogated but is satisfied, and men, though sinners, are now justified sinners. Thus, though

---

[1] Survey, Chapter 52, p. 75, quoted by Huehns, op. cit., p. 50: Comparison with the original text reveals that Huehns is slightly misleading here for actually Rutherford puts these words into the mouth of "Pelagians" to show that Saltmarsh is condemned as a legalist by his own principles.

V25 it is satisfied, Law stands yet, and though men are justified, they are yet sinners. Put in this negative fashion it may be seen that Rutherford's comment, though true, could have been fuller. Antinomianism is a legal doctrine in a very lively sense and one must wonder whether, had it truly set men's consciences at rest, it would have been pressed beyond its true meaning into distorted forms, verbal and practical.[1] The sectarianism of "inward religion," which is an expression of anti-ecclesiastical antinomianism, is at heart a self-defensive reaction. Members of such sects become themselves "the Elect"--and on their own terms! The underlying legalism of free-grace antinomianism provokes a profound disquiet and, finally, the reaction of rejection of the whole thesis upon which that doctrine rests, namely, "fictitious justification." Instead, the sectarian substitutes the confidence born of knowing that he is "holy" and has actual possession of divinity through mystical means of union. In such a condition, of course, one cannot sin! This proposition savors of desperation as does the proposition that if one is justified then one cannot sin;[2] of this latter

---

[1] It is to be noticed that Saltmarsh is still in his own eyes a pitiable unlovable creature even after discovering the liberty of the New Birth. The rapture and the self-abasement display the warfare inherent in the "sick-soul"; Cp. Wm. James' Varieties of Religious Experience (1902), lectures VI and VII.

[2] Cp. E. Bax, Rise and Fall of the Anabaptists (London, 1903), p. 35, for the example of the "Holy and Sinless Baptists" listed by Bullinger (d. 1575). They struck out the petition for forgiveness from the Paternoster.

V26 view Tobias Crispe is perhaps the most extreme proponent in the England of the sixteen-forties. The tendency here displayed in both these views inevitably leads to the abrogation of Law.

The uncomfortable interior stress which we see in Saltmarsh is typical of antinomianism. As Huehns points out[1] the movement heavily stressed the thought of "unworthiness" in order to give greater relief. The Preface of Eaton's Honeycombe provides us with an apt example of this:

> To the Christian Reader, enlightend in some measure of truth to see his lost estate, by the horrible filthinesse of the least sinne in the sight of God; and thereby terrified with the multitude of his manifold sins, Grace, Mercy and Peace be multiplied from Jesus Christ our Lord, and only Saviour.

The supernal agency is invoked by the means of the most implicit faith. For out of a very pessimistic assessment of human nature grows the wish for, and thus the doctrine, that a man is acceptable to God by means of the Christ within. Huehns illustrates this by means of a quotation from Paul Hobson: ". . . in all your acts Christ acts, and in all Christ's acts within you, you act . . . and in your lowest acts Christ acts as well as in your highest."[2]

The theme of mystical union may be further illustrated by these words of Couling: "Can it be imagined that where

---

[1] Cp. Huehns, op. cit., pp. 43-44.

[2] Ibid., Cf. Hobson, Practicall Divinity (1646), p. 17.

V27 the pure God dwelleth, and is made one with the creature, there can be any defect, or impurnesse remain? Shall the head be clean and the body polluted?"[1] Extreme measures are resorted to wherever there is extreme need. The predicament epitomized in Saltmarsh is answered, finally, in deification. We saw a very similar process at work among the Familists, and we shall see that Abiezer Coppe, the arch-Ranter, speaks of "my Almightinesse within me."

The mental state, preoccupied with sin and with remedies for it--a very neurotic condition--is thrown into relief by contrast with persons like Walwyn and Winstanley. Walwyn also suffered from a tortured, puritan conscience and found some sort of rest in antinomianism. Yet he hauled himself from out the antinomian pit on a cable of good common-sense, for he was not of a "twice-born" temper. He set about "Levelling" with a will, to see what he could do to improve his fellows' lot, being of a practical turn of mind.[2] He

---

[1] N. Couling, The Saints perfect in this Life or never (London, 1647), p. 6.

[2] Cp. Haller, Liberty and Reformation, pp. 164-165. I have differed from Haller in my interpretation of Walwyn. Haller implies that antinomianism provides the strength for Walwyn's practical commonsense. I see it the other way round. Walwyn makes use of antinomianism because it sets him free to do as he wants. Haller makes a brilliant choice of quotation to epitomize Walwyn's practical commonsense; "I abandon all nicities and uselesse things; . . . my manner is in all disputes (,) reasonings and discourses, to enquire what is the use; and if I find it not very materiall, I abandon it." This quotation is taken from Walwyn's A Whisper in the Eare of Mr. Thomas Edwards (London, 1646), p. 3. Cf. McMichael, in his doctoral dissertation presented at Columbia University in 1966, The Life and Thought of William Walwyn, Seventeenth Century Englishman; McMichael seems to agree more with this

V28 might have said, with Winstanley, "I have writ; I have acted; I have peace." These men provide a living example of these thoughts of George Herbert's:

. . . Not so, my heart! but there is fruit
And thou hast hands
Recover all thy sigh-blown age
On double pleasures. Leave thy cold dispute
Of what is fit, and not. Forsake thy cage
Thy rope of sands
Which pettie thoughts have made,
and made to thee
Good cable, to enforce, and draw
And be thy law
While thou didst wink, and wouldst not see . . .
Call in thy death's head there. Tie up thy fears.
He that forbears
To suit and serve his need
Deserves his load. . . .[1]

It is to be observed that historians who write about the Puritan epoch always include antinomianism as a topic of interest and importance worthy of investigation and discussion while the extreme *nomianism* of the period draws little attention. It seems natural, proper, and right to them. Certainly it is noted; certainly it is remarked upon as a characteristic of Puritan Calvinism, but it is seldom *questioned*. Yet, upon remarking a book like *Gods Holy Minde* by Ed. Elton, published in 1648, which contains nearly four

---

present writer than with Dr. Haller. He speaks of Walwyn's "social, love-centered, prophetic, "Antinomian," Gospel Evangelical, brand of Christianity. . . ." (p. 363). *Social* concerns, not theological, dominated Walwyn's mind.

[1] Taken from George Herbert's *The Collar* (c. 1632) found in *A Priest to the Temple*. This poem was written when Herbert was in a state of great frustration at Bemerton, and suffering from a tortured conscience.

V29 hundred pages of the most refined development of the Decalogue--a book which was much admired and appreciated, inveighing as it does against anything and everything which might conceivably minister to the lusts of the flesh and the pride of life--one cannot **help but** marvel at its Rabbinical tone. It is a Christian equivalent of a book of the Mishnah or Talmud. It represents a frame of mind which St. Paul would have identified with Hagar whereas the antinomians of free-grace, certainly in their pristine and pure position, would have been identified with the free woman.[1] This quarrel between the Law and the Spirit is, as we have noted, an ancient one, but it goes back far beyond Paul even, at least to the declarations of Jeremiah and Ezekiel.[2] There have always been those who find in the bondage to Law a delightful security both for the inward man and for the familiar institutions of society. There is perhaps no more sublime expression of this than Psalm 119, a massive paean of 176 verses:

> O Lord, what delight have I unto Thy Law,
> All the day long is my study in it.
> Thou, through Thy Commandments
> Hast made me wiser than my enemies . . .
> How sweet are Thy words unto my mouth,
> Yea, sweeter than Honey unto my throat. . . .[3]

The story of St. Paul's struggle with adherents to the Law finds a parallel in the Puritan epoch. For there were those who found the sweetness of the Law's honey more desirable even than that of Eaton's honeycombe of free-grace. The nectar of the Law is highly addictive, and antinomians, immensely confident, and feeling that St. Paul was with them, believed that it had a highly inhibitory effect upon spiritual life and particularly upon Christian spiritual, spirit-filled, life. They could ask in Paul's own words, "Are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit are ye now perfected in the flesh?"[1]

---

[1] Cp. Epistle to the Galatians, 4:21-end.

[2] Cp. Jeremiah 31 and Ezekiel 18.

[3] Psalm 119 "mem." Cf. Psalm 19:9-11, ". . . sweeter also than honey, and the honeycombe."

In retrospect, one can see that the nomianism to which they so objected sprang from more than mere addiction to mechanical religion. It was rooted in the massive movement of lay piety deriving from the now almost universal reading of the Scriptures. The Bible was Everyman's book supplying his want in every toil-free hour: it told him how he came to be; of God's Providence in history; of the Fall and the Redemption of man; it supplied the words of the Prophets and the sublime discourses of the World's Redeemer; it gave a man a rod by which to measure his own times, and hopeful examples of God's saving interventions in the times of others; when sorrowful he could lament with Jeremiah and Job, and when merry he could sing psalms. Above all this, the Bible portrayed the lives of just men with whom God was well pleased, examples which a weak and perplexed man might

---

[1] Galatians 3:3.

V31 strive to follow. For all that St. Paul had said about Law and Grace, had not the Redeemer himself proclaimed the eternity of the Law, and had he not said that except a man's righteousness exceed that of the Scribes and Pharisees he should "in no wise enter the Kingdom of Heaven?"[1] Where the fashions of men change, "the Word of the Lord standeth for ever," providing stability and grounds for confidence in tumultuous times. It is a convincing and comprehensible point of view; but it is not the position in which Paul, and those antinomians who enthusiastically believed that they followed him, found spirit and life. And when persecuted, they knew themselves to be the "children of promise," and that "as then he that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the Spirit,"[2] so it was now.

A few disparate points remain to be briefly mentioned as we wind up our discussion. First if should be indicated here that the topic of pantheistic antinomianism will be dealt with in the discussion of the arch-Ranter writings though it may be remarked here that the respective realms of free-Spirit and of pantheistic god-within can be distinguished with clarity only when pantheism develops into a fully-fledged materialistic form.

The impotency and passivity of the will which we noticed in the quietism of the Familists, Boehme, and Sterry, and

---

[1] Matthew 5:16-20.

[2] Galatians 4:28-29.

V32 which we shall see in certain of the arch-Ranters, is a feature also of "free-grace": "God has made a covenant of grace absolutely, and has tied man by no conditions. 'Free' grace means that a man is passive even in receiving the gifts of God."[1] This tendency is of course present in extreme statements of predestination. Though this particular doctrine is thought of as dependent upon the Calvinist statement (after St. Paul) of the absolute unconditioned nature of God's Will it is also an inevitable consequence of a pantheistic view of the universe, whether in an ideal or materialistic form. Boehme, as we have seen, conjoins the concepts of pantheism and divine Will.

The theme of melancholic scrupulousness and of depressed withdrawal from the world which we have now noticed some several times, is iterated and reiterated in the writings of the period. Thus, Stephen Geree, writing in 1644, makes the perspicuous comment that the action of the Spirit perfecting in a man is:

> . . . a doctrine as dangerous as plausible . . . by its seeming so much to magnifie the grace of God and Christ. It takes and taints those that be in some sort brought out of love with the world and have begun to deny themselves out of a sense of their own sinfulnesse.[2]

---

[1] Whiting, *op. cit.*, p. 268.

[2] *The Doctrine of the Antinomians by Evidence of God's Truth plainely confuted* (1644), Epistle to the Reader, p. 2, quoted by Huehns, *op. cit.*, p. 38.

V33 There is no question that the Pauline doctrine of the work of the Spirit within, changing a man from glory to glory, has proved to be a powerful religious force. Can any limit be placed on the Spirit's work? Will not a man, appalled and overwhelmed by the evil in himself and in the world at large, confide all his trust to the Spirit, disregarding his own self and his own will as relatively unimportant? And, if urged by influential teachers to set the world at naught, so that he despise it, and abandon all sense of responsibility for it, will he not become truly antinomian--set free by the Spirit to rejoice in the sweetness of the Lord? Like William Dell, a man of faith may believe that a man's reformation ". . . once begun, is never intermitted again till all be perfected. For as long as God's nature dwells in ours, it will ever be reforming our nature to itself till it be altogether like it. . . ."[1] Such doctrine, authentic to the New Testament and to the continuing Christian tradition may lead an enthusiast far. To be spirit-filled is to possess--at least in potential--divine attributes. This we saw in the Familists. Further, the doctrine of the universal indwelling of the Spirit passes gently, and without difficulty, into pantheism.

Finally, that the body is the temple of the Holy Spirit is a belief true to the ancient Hebrew doctrine of creation. The antinomianism of free grace and spirit inculcated

---

[1] Wm. Dell, Right Reformation, a sermon (1646), p. 9, quoted by Huehns, op. cit., p. 38.

V34

reverence for the body as the vessel of the soul.[1] It is, strangely, the other side of the immanentalistic doctrine which made the body for Sterry the soul's coffin. But here, indeed, we see an important consequence of that subtle shift when the immanence of the Spirit becomes pantheism.

* * * * *

The free spirit associated with antinomianism expressed itself powerfully in the pulpit and at the market-cross. Prophesyings and lecturings provided a vastly popular and diverting form of entertainment.

> By April, 1644, Richard Vines was complaining in sermon to the Lord Mayor and Aldermen of a kind of person he calls a nomad or walker, "who will not endure to sit at the feet of a constant godly ministry" but who "wanders away the Sabbeth by peeping in at Church-dores, and taking essay of an sentence or two, and then if there be no *scratch* for his *itch*, *lambit* and *fugit*, he is gone."[2]

Among such were Winstanley, Muggleton, and the arch-Ranter Laurence Clarkson. They, and their like, heard an enormous variety of gospels preached, for it became quite common to hear three or four lectures or sermons in a week. The thought is in a way rather amusing but one wonders how many consciences were confused or undone in the process. Further, almost anyone who has witnessed "mission preaching" and has heard the rhetorical hammer striking expertly and persistently upon the seven deadly themes, must also have witnessed the

---

[1] *Ibid*., p. 102.

[2] Haller, *Liberty and Reformation*, p. 165.

V35 equally deadly effect it has upon folk who are easily reached through their guilt-feelings and self-doubt. How much exposure to this type of assault can a normally sensitive person endure? Some become hardened, others break.

This confused babble of gospels to be heard in the sixteen-forties sprang from the principle that, "The Scriptures were only to be understood as the Spirit revealed them."[1] Thus the "immediate" experience undercut the authority of Scripture. The prevalence of preachers claiming inner illumination and immediate revelation gave an impression to the simple that the age of the Spirit was come indeed. The revelations were naturally more attractive to some than the printed page of the Bible, for the former were new, fresh, and cogent. All this made for widespread instability--as much in social and political life as in religious, moral, and spiritual. Corporate discussion of the preachers and their preaching kept the populace in a constant state of "itch," and hence in a persistent search for "scratch." The Spirit proved not to be a Spirit of peace and order, but of confusion.

Conclusion

The ancient quarrel between priest and prophet, between Law and Grace, which erupted again at the Reformation burst

---

[1] Whiting, op. cit., p. 269.

V36 forth anew in England once it was perceived that "New Presbyter is but old Priest writ large." The potent preaching of Law tended by its irritation of tender consciences to provoke a rejection of Law altogether. This made for instability, and in some, the inflammation of consciences already scrupulous. The case of Muggleton, briefly presented in the previous chapter, provided us with a useful example, and Perkins' analysis is enlightening. Fear of judgment and hell led some to distort the doctrine of free-grace into the notion that the elect could not sin, and this doctrine in turn linked itself, through the doctrine of the indwelling spirit, with that of passive deification of the believer. For such, Law is abrogated.

We noticed that there existed in our period a strong fixation on Predestination which leads to a paralysis of the will, a condition aided and abetted by strong emphasis upon the Spirit's indwelling.

Further, the doctrine of the free Spirit, expressed in the discords of preaching, prattling, and prating, undermined the authority of Scripture. As the Spirit abounded, so the prophets much more abounded.

We are now in a position to examine the figures and the surviving writings of the four best-known arch-Ranters, Joseph Salmon, Jacob Bauthumley, Abiezer Coppe, and Laurence Clarkson, men who, together with many others, were the unhappy heirs of the disconcertment of their century.

Part II, sheet 1

PART II

Part II, sheet 2

Four Epitomes

In the following four chapters we shall survey the surviving writings of four arch-Ranters. In each case we shall attempt to gain a picture of the man and his spirituality, and to discover what element in the Ranter stream he mainly represents. In discovering the relationship of each to the folk who made up the body of the stream we shall be largely forced back on conjecture.

Of the personal relationships between these four leaders we know almost nothing. It is quite possible that they knew each other only slightly though doubtless they had heard of each other and had read each other's writings.

There are similarities of experience, as well as of writing, between certain of the four, but this does not necessarily indicate that they depend upon each other. They shared a common environment and were drawn along by the same currents of thought and emotion. In these studies it has not been our purpose to present in each case an absolutely complete portrait -- a goal which would have involved much useless repetition -- but to draw out those aspects in which the arch-Ranter is different from the others, albeit only in the emphasis which he gives, or is given in him, to an element present in all of them. These men must typify for us the loose Ranter community.

Part II, Sheet 3

Our problem lies in attempting to typify, not well-balanced religious postures, but half-formed attitudes and ill-assorted beliefs -- in a word, incoherent jumbles. It may be true that some beliefs, such as pantheism or the non-existence of evil, were held by almost all those who may legitimately be described as Ranters, but it is far from clear that they all held these opinions for the same reasons! Any attempt to give a coherent and complete account of the interweavings and interstices of thought of the religious nether world of mid-seventeenth-century England must be abandoned as hopeless: it would be like attempting to describe in detail the inner structure of the pumice stone poured out from a volcano!

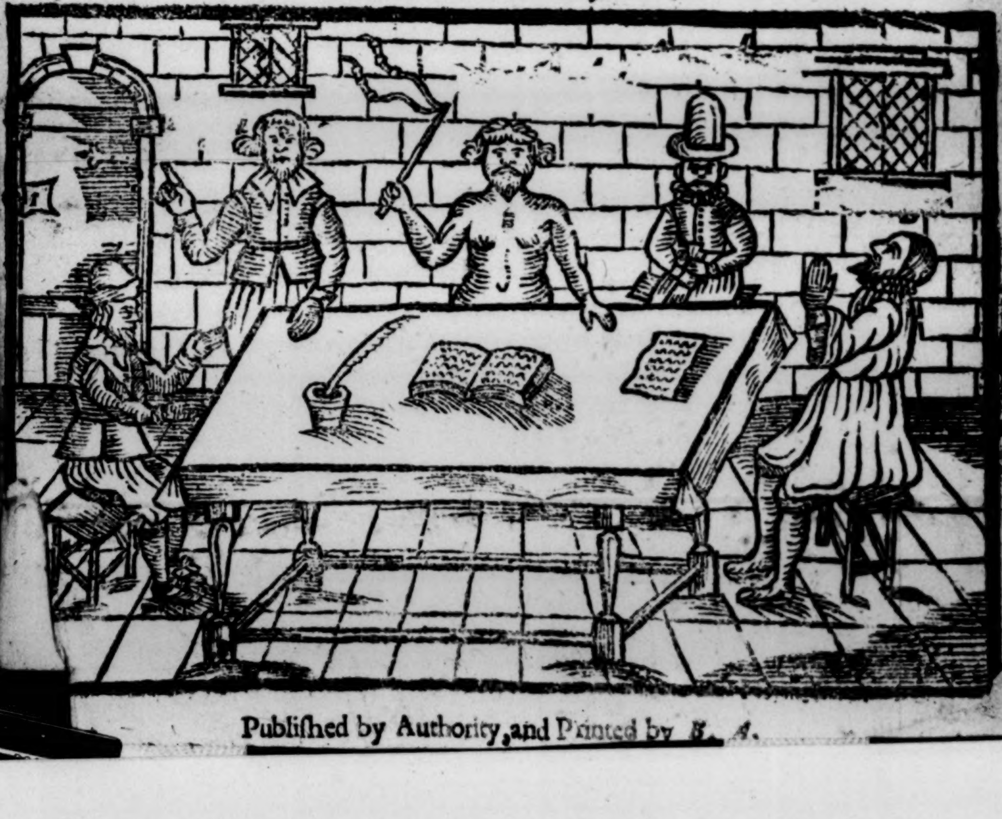
Salmon

9

THE
ROVTING
OF THE
RANTERS

Being a full Relation of their uncivil carriages, and blaſphemous words and actions at their mad meetings, their ſeveral kind of muſick, dances, and ryotings, and their belief and opinions concerning heaven and hell. With their examinations taken before a Juſtice of Peace, and a Letter or Summons ſent to their ſiſters or fellow creatures in the name of the Divel, requiring them to meet *Belzebub*, *Lucifer*, *Pluto*, and twenty more of the infernall ſpirits at the time and place appointed. Alſo, a true deſcription how they may be known in al companies and the names of the chief Ring-leaders of this new generation that excell all others in wickedneſſe.

Novemb: 19 1650



Publiſhed by Authority, and Printed by B. A.

6/1

CHAPTER VI

JOSEPH SALMON

"For in Him we live, and move, and have our being."

In 1649, passing from Mansfield-Woodhouse near Leicester, George Fox came to Coventry intent on visiting some people who he heard were in prison "for religion." He was "ravished with the sense of the love of God." He writes: "But when I came into the jail where the prisoners were, a great power of darkness struck at me, and I sate still, having my spirit gathered into the love of God." Fox then goes on to prepare his reader for a contrast between his own spirituality and that of the prisoners, for he continues:

> At last these prisoners began to rant, and vapour, and blaspheme, at which my soul was greatly grieved. They said they were God; but another of them said, "We could not bear such things." So when they were calm, I stood up and asked them whether they did such things by motion, or from Scripture; and they said "From Scripture."

Fox felt bound to challenge this so, "A Bible lying by, I asked them for that Scripture; and they shewed me the place where the sheet was let down to Peter, and it was said to him what was sanctified he should not call common or unclean." Fox proceeded to show these people, at least to his own satisfaction, that this Scripture would not suit their purpose, nor yet other texts which they brought. He then presents himself as the arch-debater, and the epitome of sanity and common-

6/2

sense. He writes with sarcasm:

> Then seeing they were God, I asked them if they knew whether it would rain tomorrow. They said they could not tell. I told them God could tell. Again I asked them if they thought they should always be in that condition, or should change, and they answered they could not tell. Then said I unto them, "God can tell, and God doth not change. You say you are God; and yet you cannot tell whether you shall change or no."

The triumphant Fox adds: "So they were confounded, and quite brought down for a time. After I had reproved them for their blasphemous expressions, I went away; for I perceived they were Ranters."

This was Fox's first encounter with Ranters and it seems to have been rather unnerving for afterwards (as he records) he "admired the goodness of the Lord in appearing so unto me before I went amongst them." Fox comments further: "Not long after this, one of these Ranters, whose name was Joseph Salmon, put forth a paper or book of recantation; upon which they were set at liberty."[1]

---

[1] G. Fox, Journal: a revised edition by N. Penney (London, Dent, 1924), pp. 27-28. The passages quoted are regarded by such an admirer of Geo. Fox as Geoffrey Nuttall as exhibiting Fox's great practicality and "earthy common sense." Perhaps this is so, but the following quotation from Tauler may put such "common-sense" into perspective:

> "It is not for you to know the times or the seasons which the Father has put into his own power." Dear children, the Holy Ghost will not teach us all things in the sense that we shall be given to know whether there will be a good harvest or vintage, whether bread will be dear or cheap, whether the present will come to an end soon. No, dear children; but he will teach us all things which we can need for a perfect life. . . . Sermons, ed. by H. R. Allinson, pp. 324-326. cf. p. 354.

6/3

Joseph Salmon

As we have noted, it was in 1649 that Fox met Salmon in prison. This imprisonment very likely marked the end of Salmon's membership in the Army for he is known to have served from 1647 until sometime that year. He is known to us chiefly through his writings,[1] but also through the records of Rochester Cathedral in Kent and through a pamphlet by W. Rosewell published at the close of Salmon's ministry there in 1656.[2] He is last mentioned in a letter dated 3 November 1656 from Barbados, Henry Fell to Margaret Fell: there he is mentioned as seeming to deny his former ranting ways.[3] He still had followers at that time, and indeed, Whiting records that "a sect of Salmonists was spoken of as still existing in 1706."[4]

Thus, little is known of Salmon before his notoriety as a fiery antinomian preacher in the Army in 1647 -- of which period his Antichrist in Man is a product -- and nothing is known of him personally after 1656. His A Rout, a Rout of

---

[1] Salmon's surviving writings are as follows:
Antichrist in Man . . . . (1647). Hereafter AIM
A Rout, a Rout (1649). Hereafter RR
Heights in Depths and Depths in Heights . . . . (1651). Hereafter HID

[2] W. Rosewell, The Serpents Subtilty Discovered (Lond. 1656). Some further (undocumented) facts are given in DNB.

[3] Cp. Swarthmore MSS 1.66. Tr. 2:101

[4] C. E. Whiting. Studies in English Puritanism from the Restoration to the Revolution 1660-1668 (Lond. 1931), pp. 277-278.

6/4

1649, ordered burnt by Parliament, was written at the height of his period as Ranter, and his Heights in Depths of 1651 testifies to his penitence for it.

Rosewell's comments on Salmon, even though hostile, are valuable in view of the paucity of information available. He records that Salmon appeared in Rochester Cathedral about 1651 or 1652, and

> set up a course of preaching . . . where his manner was to Allegorize the Scripture and make a nose of wax of it, forcing some Allegorical sense on the plainest Historicall and Doctrinall passages of the Old and New Testament: He denied all forms whatsoever in Religion (not excepting the form of sound words, 2 Tim. 1.13) he desperately undermined the whole mystery of godliness, and sowed the seeds of Ranting Familism; yet managed his devilish designs so slily and cunningly, that it was not easie for an ordinary hearer to discover them, though to a judicious ear, they were discernable enough; his language was smooth and taking, especially with carnall auditors, that delight more in Playbooks, then in the Book of God.

Rosewell's "judicious ear" was very sensitive to Jo. Salmon's "devilish designs"; he goes on to quote St. Augustine:

> What St. Augustine writs of Faustus the Manichee, Confess. 1.5.c.3.Sec.1 I have often thought with myself, might justly be applied unto him: That he was "magneus laqueus diaboli, & multi implicabantur in eo per illecebram suaviloquentiae" (i.e.) a great snare of the devil, and many were intangled in him, through the allurement of his sweet language.

It is, in fact, too modest to describe Salmon's language as sweet, for indeed it often rises to great heights of poetic beauty: Rosewell, while making allusion to prominent figures of the early Church, might well have made an allusion to

6/5

Chrysostom -- a generous gesture to weigh against his allusion to Faustus. Rosewell briefly concludes

> But Salmon declined, and leaving Rochester, betook himself to the Sea. Richard Coppin replaced him, brought by Hils the Searcher (who with Rob. Cozens and John Phinehas, Carpenters, had been principall fautors and followers of Salmon).[1]

Rosewell's reference to "Hills the Searcher" indicates that Salmon, at least while at Rochester, had been involved with some sort of Seeker group. This is further borne out by Rosewell's comment that Salmon "denied all forms whatsoever in Religion" though, be it noted, this is linked by Rosewell with "Ranting Familism." It becomes evident that the terms 'Searcher' or 'Seeker,' like those of 'Ranter' and 'Familist' and 'Anabaptist,' are loose ones. Indeed, for some, all these terms are but terms of opprobrium for any who sought to endeavor themselves in inward religion. 'Seekers' are generally thought of as having abandoned belief in any organization as the true Church of God, and, thereby, as having abandoned 'forms': yet apparently there were yet some who found no difficulty in associating themselves with a Cathedral and its services, and where those services were, in principle, preachings of the Word.

---

[1] R. Rosewell, op. cit., pp. 1-2. Salmon's principles were those also of Richard Coppin. Abiezer Coppe, another of the arch-Ranters, wrote prefaces to two of Coppin's writings: cp. C. E. Whiting, op. cit., pp. 278-283, where a sufficient account of Coppin is given.

6/6

Salmon is placed among the Seekers by Huehns,[1] made an example of "un-illuminated quietism," and excluded on this basis from among the Ranters! This is a curious assessment for while, indeed, he may be included among the Seekers, he certainly did not consider himself "un-illuminated" in 1649, the date at which Huehns quotes him;[2] and the evidence of Fox, in addition to Salmon's own account of himself in his Heights in Depths, places him among the Ranters without any possibility of doubt. In fact it is reasonable to call him a ranting-Seeker!

At this point it may be worth while to set out briefly the general characteristics of those known as 'Seeker.'[3] They taught, according to Baxter, that

> our Scripture was uncertain; that present miracles are necessary to Faith; that our ministry is null and without authority and our worship and ordinances being lost, for which they are now seeking. . . .[4]

As a group they were not organized and had no common creed: thus they were not truly a sect. A Seeker was anyone who was

---

[1] G. Huehns, Antinomianism in English History, with special reference to the Period 1640-1660 (Lond. Cresset Press, 1951), pp. 108-109.

[2] cp. A Rout, a Rout written 1648, published 1649.

[3] We depend upon Richard Baxter, Reliquiae Baxterianae (1696), ed. by J. M. Lloyd Thomas (Lond. Dent, 1925); R. Barclay, The Inner Life of the Religious Societies of the Commonwealth (London, Hodder and Stoughton, 1876), a book quoted by all historians of our period; and R. Jones, Studies in Mystical Religion (Lond. Macmillan, 1923); see esp. pp. 449-481.

[4] R. Baxter, op. cit., p. 73.

6/7 in a religiously uncertain state of mind and who gave this state a certain identity by mingling with others who shared or who were thought to share it. Rufus Jones locates Seekerism in the wake of the "spiritual movement" of which Ubbo Phillips had been a prime example, which is to say, of the quietist 'spirit within' group. In England the movement became epitomized in the person of Bartholomew Legate who was put to death by fire at Smithfield in 1612 for so-called "Arian heresy."[1] But the movement was not named 'Seeker' until 1617.[2] It was recognized then as being in some way antinomian in character, antinomian, that is, in the way represented later by John Saltmarsh,[3] emphasizing both a rejection of the existing ecclesiastical status quo and also the importance of Free Grace. Huehns wishes to emphasize the quietist character of Seeking and to contrast it with the activist character of Ranting. As an example of the latter, she refers to Laurence Clarkson, one of the most notorious of the Ranters, and a Ranter leader.[4] This example appears ill-chosen, however, because if Thos. Edwards is to be believed, Clarkson also was identified with the Seekers: "Lawrence

---

[1] cp. article by Alex. Gordon in DNB.

[2] cp. Jones, Studies in Myst. Rel., p. 455.

[3] For further details on Saltmarsh cp. our previous chapter.

[4] cp. Huehns, op. cit., loc. cit.

6/8 Clerkson turned from Anabaptist and Dipper to be a Seeker and to deny the Scriptures to be the rule of a Christian."[1]

In other words, it is not really possible to separate Seekers and Ranters as such. The fact is that some Seekers ranted and all Ranters were, in some sense, Seekers, for 7 they, too, accorded no certainty to Scripture, no authority to the Church, and set no store by ordinances, depending instead upon some inward light and inspiration.

The Seeker state of mind is nicely analyzed and categorized by Barclay. Following one John Jackson, writing in 1655, he says that there were three sorts of Seekers: first, those who were against all ordinances (i.e. Baptism, Communion, Preaching of the Word, etc.); secondly, those who did not see sufficient ground for the present practice of ordinances; and, thirdly, those who were above or beyond all ordinances. Barclay believed that those of the first and last category were "rapidly merged in the opinions and practices of the Ranters," and that those of the last category were not truly Seekers but "enjoyers."[2] The followers of A. Coppe the arch-Ranter were called "high attainers" and Barclay is certainly right about some of these persons, but whether he was right to make so general an implication about all Ranters must remain an open question, for it must remain dubious that even many, and certainly not all "high attainers" truly found and enjoyed!

---

[1] Edward's Gangraena quoted by R. Jones, op. cit., p. 457. Clarkson supports this statement in his own account of his personal history in The Lost Sheep Found (Lond. 1660), see infra.

[2] cp. Barclay, op. cit., p. 413.

The relationship between Seeking and Ranting cannot be portrayed in any simple fashion, of course, since we are dealing with people and not with abstract formulae. Each person runs his own spiritual race, and one receives a crown of laurel, or perhaps of ivy, while another falls short. In any case, the runner moves from one place to another and visits places in between. The religious literature of seventeenth-century England abounds in accounts of such energetic pilgrimages. William Penn in his Introduction to Fox's Journal[1] points to the process in inward spiritual life, and how easily one might slip from Seeker quietism to Seeker ranterism.

Three stages are plainly discernible in the life of Jo. Salmon: they are, first, the quietist Seeker (or Familist) period which gave forth his Antichrist in Man in 1647; secondly, the ranting prophet stage issuing in his A Rout, a Rout of 1649; and, thirdly, another quiet period, one of retrenchment and consolidation, expressed in his Heights in Depths of 1651. We shall now consider Salmon in each of these stages.

Antichrist in Man is a spiritual treatise and appears to have no purpose other than that of the spiritual edification

---

[1] Previously quoted in our Chapter I.

6/10

of the reader. In expression it makes abundant use of biblical language, and, in particular, of the Revelation of St. John the Divine. The vivid and poetic expressions of that book were fascinating to Salmon as to many writers and readers of his time: they served to convey a sense of the mystery of revelation, and the mystery of that which was revealed.

It cannot be said, in light of what has been already said in our discussions, that Salmon shows any originality of idea in his little book. He must have known this, and one must presume that he was writing specifically for his followers, people who had little access to the ideas he was teaching save perhaps through the general filtering and dissemination of them at the fringes of Baptist and Familistic movements.

"Antichrist in man" proves to be nothing more or less than 'reason.' Reason is fleshly and is therefore opposed to, and is a barrier to, 'true' spiritual understanding. After Luther, Salmon declares that reason is the Great Whore, seducing men from the truth.[1]

> She is willing to let Thee understand that Christ hath been made flesh for Thee, but not that the word is made flesh in Thee; that is that this God hath by his own power begotten himself, and brought forth himself in his own likeness in Thee.

---

[1] This theme is developed in a late work of the arch-Ranter L. Clarkson, The Right Devil Discovered (Lond. 1659).

6/11 This familiar theme of inward religion is developed further in words which were taken perhaps directly from Familist writings:

> thou art this virgin that is over-shaddowed with power from on High, and hast the imortall seed of God in Thee; which Immortall Seed by its own power; brings forth its own selfe in the soul; by the puttings forth of the motions of the spirit in thee. . . .[1]

We see, then, that Salmon's followers also were "Maries" and cherished within themselves a hidden divinity. Only "fleshly wisdom" can conceal this truth from oneself, he avers.

Fleshly wisdom is expressed, not only in reasonings and debatings, but, he teaches, in the formalities of outward religion. In true Seeker spirit he writes,

> Christian, wait upon the Lord and thou shalt renew thy strength; Christ must have his time to lye in the grave, hidden from thee in all his appearances to thee; but this know, he will see thee againe, in a more Spirituall discovery of himself it is but a while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry. . . .

Platonism then makes its contribution:

> and he will take thee up into himselfe, above these Types and Figures; . . . hee will bring thee to the injoyment of the Substance, and thou shalt no more live upon the Shadow; thou shalt live upon the kernell, and not alwaies be cracking upon the shell. . . .[2]

These passages quoted display the practice, earlier found in Everard, of the 'interiorizing' of scripture. Salmon is explicit about this and does not hedge as much as Everard

---

[1] AIM, p. 28.

[2] AIM, p. 33.

6/12 about the reality and importance of the historicity of the Christian story. It is truly not important at all. If this is not plain, Salmon implies, it is because one is deceived by the Great Whore. This Whore is mankind's great spiritual enemy. Will, then, this enemy ever be destroyed? Yes, mystically, at the mystical Last Day:

> Thou art therefore to expect *Jesus* to come to Judgement in Thee; and the end of the *world* to be in Thee: thou art to waite for the return of this *Jesus* in *spirit* . . . for there is nothing that shall happen or fall out to thee, in relation to the day of Judgement, which shall not be verified in thee, in this Life. . . .

Here, he hedges just a little, continuing: ". . . though it may bee not in the same manifestative measure or fulness, as it shall be hereafter."[1] Though one is left very uncertain as to what Salmon means by "hereafter," it is evident that any sense of the reality of history has slipped away. History is not a Pilgrimage from Creation to Judgment. There is not truly any more future expectation. Redemption and reward is to be expected now, in this very present. This is exactly the position of those Familists castigated by Jno. Etherington as having no "hope or expectation of any other coming of Christ hereafter, of a perfection, of a resurrection of the body, an eternall life, salvation, glory. . . ."[2] This is a fundamentally passive and unstimulating and unprogressive view of the Christian life.

---

[1] *AIM*, p. 47.

[2] J. Etherington, *A Brief Discovery* (Lond. 1645), unpaginated, quoted more fully in the conclusion of our Chapter II.

6/13 Salmon makes but one explicit reference to history in which he displays that he is not unaware of the problem or of what he is doing with it. He writes:

> And in all my Mysticall applying of any Scriptures; I would not be thought hereby to endeavour the overture of the History; but only so much of the History as I see verified in me. . . .[1]

These words are somewhat enigmatical but their general direction is clear. History is irrelevant apart from the immediate truths of present experience. As a doctrine of subjectivism, at least, this is crystal clear.

The passivity of the soul in the process of passing from false knowledge to true, and from old life to new, which we have noted before in other exponents of inward religion or spiritual religion -- the Familists, Boehme, Sterry -- appears in a well-developed form in Salmon. Revelation of the appearance of the Whore 'reason' in the soul comes by the intervention of God who carries a man away into the desert by the Spirit. While wrapped in the "Mantle of Nature" one is in spiritual slumber. But then God "speaks by the small and still voyce . . . and takes a Soul up beyonde self and creature; in so much that now the creature sees all to be but vanity, below Christ: now I say, the creature comes to some discovery of himself; but never before."[2]

---

[1] AIM, p. 67.

[2] AIM, pp. 35-36.

6/14 The soul, as it appears in Salmon, is small and weak, and of itself can do nothing.[1] Passively, it must wait

> so that now when God carryes away a soul in the spirit, and loses it, as it were, to its selfe; and lets loose the beames of his owne glory upon it; ravisheth the heart with his own beauty, catcheth him up, as it were into the third heavens, (sic) and sheweth such divine excellency as it never yet apprehended. . . .[2]

Such an one becomes a "Spirituall Man." And how far is such a man from the world of ordinary men! "In a word, the Saint truly spirituallized, beholds self and flesh, to be the most hatefull, detestable, loathsome thing in the world to him . . . ."[3]

Salmon does not intend to be merely figurative in saying this. He goes on to say that Resurrection is, and is only, a spiritual thing.[4] In this he expresses a conviction widespread among the sects.

The second stage in Jo. Salmon's spiritual wanderings as revealed in his writings is that of 'ranting prophet.' His

---

[1] cp. the Gospel according to John 15.5.

[2] AIM, p. 38.

[3] It is interesting to compare Salmon's words with those of Plotinus: "What else is Sophrosyny, rightly so called, but to take no part in the pleasures of the body. . . . The Soul thus cleansed is all Idea and Reason, wholly free of body, intellective, entirely of that divine order from which the well-spring of Beauty arises and all the race of Beauty." Enneads I,6.6. This translation is taken from that of Stephen MacKenna (London, Faber & Faber, 1956). Boehme also expresses the same feeling, and it is further echoed in the writing of the arch-Ranter Jacob Bauthumley, Light and Dark Sides of God, pp. 49-50.

[4] AIM, p. 52.

6/15 A Rout, a Rout of 1649 is the revealing item.[1] It indicates the transitional shift between the two types of enthusiasm discussed earlier. We noticed this shift in David Joris but in a reverse order to that in Salmon. Salmon's pamphlet was actually written in 1648 when he was in the army. It does not reveal in what capacity he served, however.

The pamphlet is written not only to the army but to a specific group of people who remained unnamed. It probably consisted of a loosely-knit association of 'fringers' from various sources. Perhaps some of them were Ranters. He alludes to criticism and condemnation regarding him, and says, "I will own it all, being willing to become sin for you, though the Lord in me knows no sin." This doctrine of the impeccability of the spiritual reality within is highly reminiscent of the teaching of Plotinus.[2] Divinely impeccable, Salmon speaks to those who also are 'spiritual men,' the Lord's "jewels in the army":

> I have but this at present to say: I am now with you as Mary at the sepulchre, waiting to see the Lord: but he is risen. Your carnall affairs are the Sepulchre where the Lord is buryed to me; he is not here, he is certainly risen, but where to see him in his next appearance, I wait; I must stand at the Sepulchre till the voyce be

---

[1] RR, 14 pp, consists of "A Word to the Commanding Power in the Army," "A letter to the Fellowship of Saints scattered in the Army," and a few pages more of prophetic rant.

[2] RR, "letter to the Fellowship. . . ." cp. Plotinus Enneads I,i. 9-13 for the impeccability of the spiritual essence of the soul.

6/16

> uttered behind me, which I beleeve will be shortly, both to me and many others. Till the day break, and the shadows flee away, Farewell my Beloved.[1]

Salmon prophesies the coming of the Last Day, but it is far from clear that he looked for it, and for Christ's coming, even now in ordinary terms. One forms the impression that he himself did not know exactly what he believed, at least when he wrote these words.

In any case, his terminology is in tune with his times: everyone understood eschatological and apocryphal pronouncements whether made with respect to sagas of the soul or to the perplexities of political life. The Hand of the Lord could be seen in all things, great and small; and in the events affecting King and Parliament, Church and people, the Signs of the Times could be read.

So Jo. Salmon prophesies God's judgment upon the army after it has served God's judgment upon the King, Gentry, and Nobility:

> You have a Commission for the Lord to scourge England's Oppressors; do it in the name of God, do it (I say) fully, hotly, sharply; . . .

Then he continues:

> and the same measure you mete, shall be met to you again; for the Lord will ere long cast his rod into the fire of burning and destruction. It will be a sweet destruction, wait for it.[2]

---

[1] RR, loc. cit.

[2] RR, loc. cit.

6/17 This theme is essentially developed in the fourteen pages of the tract; i.e., how God gives a mandate to this one, then removes it to another, which becomes his instrument for the destruction of the former. Here we may perhaps see the touch of Boehme's dialectic, a doctrine which may well have been seen by Authority as anarchistic. Certainly the teaching provides a basis for civil antinomianism. Salmon says that God was hid in the darkness of absolute Monarchy, plain to those who see God in all things. But God then threw the Monarchy aside. He shifted then his power to Parliament, "they making themselves as absolute and tyranicall as ever the King in his reign. . . ." Caustically, he continues, "We see in a short time, he layes aside that glorious shew and Idol (the Parliament), and cloathes himself with the Army. . . ." the downfall of which Salmon has already prophesied, and which he now describes in plain and unkind words:

> Thus we see that God hath moved from party to party, and sits down at present in the Army: And here also God makes darkness his secret place, living under a poor, low, carnal form, and few can behold his beautifull presence under the power of the sword. The Lord here besmears himself with blood and vengeance, deforms his own beauty, hides his amiable presence under a hideous and wrathful form.[1]

It is plain to see why this publication was ordered to be burnt, for not only was it seditious, but it attacked the religious idealism of the Revolution. Salmon's authority to

---

[1] RR, pp. 2-3.

6/18 speak so he declared to come from on High, for, he says, "God hath called me forth . . . to declare my light."[1]

Here, Salmon is the enthusiast and the antinomian, following the sectarian tradition not only marked with the *imprimatur* of Thomas Münzer, but also set truly in the *genre* of the prophets of old. It is not clear that Salmon had a genuine interest in politics. He is not apparently interested in social reform, but seems rather swept up and away by a gust of feeling and imagination -- by pneumatic enthusiasm.[2] Though essentially a man of inner religion, he was not immune to the winds of change gusting about the land.

But, over against the activism of the prophetic voice, Salmon proclaims the gospel of non-violence and of passive resistance, holding up the ideal of the patient sufferer in the cause of Truth and Liberty: "We can overcome by being conquered, we can lose all, and yet be savers in the conclusion."[3] Speaking for his group he says, "The reason why we are hated, despised, and trampled upon, is, because the world knoweth us not, they nor the Father in us."[4] Christ-possessed, he continues:

---

[1] *RR*, p. 4.

[2] cp. Chapter II *supra*.

[3] Salmon *RR*, p. 9.

[4] *RR*, p. 10.

6/19

> The Lord in us, and we in the Lord, and with him, travail together under the world's infirmities. . . . We love to sweat drops of blood under all men's offences. . . . Thow all the wrath, malice, envie and scorn of man come upon us, we fear it not. . . . Lo, thus we fill up behinde the measure of the sufferings of Christ in our flesh.[1]

The work ends with a claim that the author is stricken with divine madness:

> I was once as well as you; but I am now a fool, I care not who knows it: I once *also* enjoyed myself, but I am now caryed out of my wits, a fool, a mad man, besides my self. . . .[2]

The claim to divine madness was a favorite one among the arch-Ranters. It is made not only by Salmon, but also by Bauthumley, and Coppe. To be carried out of oneself by the Spirit is, after all, the '*imprimatur*' of the true prophet, and is the quintessence of enthusiasm. It may be, however, that the experience of the arch-Ranters was not exactly the same, as we shall see when we come to examine some other cases.

The two writings which we have just surveyed are fragments of a sort: they are isolated products of an involved and busy man, and are rather tantalizing because they merely suggest the scene into which they fit. They are the products of a 'working' or 'fermenting' period.

---

[1] *RR*, *loc. cit.*

[2] *RR*, *loc. cit.*

6/20 The last of Salmon's surviving writings, that with which we are now going to deal, is his Heights in Depths of 1651 which is different in tone from the other writings, and through which a note of penitence continually murmurs.[1] The text begins with "an apologetical hint to the ensuing discourse. . . ," and, after a paragraph of extreme obscurity, Salmon writes, as he says, "more plainly" thus:

> It is not long since wherein that eminent appearance of light, which dawned out its glory upon my Spirit, and from thence gave a sweet and powerfull reflexe upon the World, did shrowde itselfe under a most sable and enigmaticall cloud of darknesse, and withdrew for a season, behinde dark Canopies of Earth and Flesh; in which state the Hemisphere of my Spirit was so bespread with obscurity, that I knew not whither I walked, or what I did. Thus was I led into paths that I had not known, and turned from a King to become a Beast (margin: like Nebuchadnezzar) and fed upon husks for a season.

He reflects that "some providence" had permitted him to be led astray, and taking comfort in the thought, he gives God thanks that he was "made a servant of sin" for "all things work together for the best to them that love God." He intends in this work to publish recantation for past errors and now writes to "give a faithful account of the dealings of the Most High" with him, and to declare to all men what he is not:

---

[1] The full title, which well illustrates Salmon's style and thought, is:

> Heights in Depths and Depths in Heights:
> or, Truth no less secretly then sweetly
> sparkling out its Glory from under a cloud
> of Obloquie/ And how the author hath been/
> redeemed from the unknown paths of darkness,/
> Together with a sincere abdication of certain
> tenents either formerly vented by him, or now
> charged upon him.

6/21

> I am now made to speak, because I am almost weary of speaking, and to inform the world that silence hath taken hold of my spirit. The thunderstrokes of the Almighty have to purpose uttered their voices in me, heaven and earth have trembled at their dreadfull sounds: the Alarm being over there's silence now in heaven; for how long I know not.

He reposes now, he says, in quietness of spirit while the Almighty power is "dashing one thing against another" in the upheaval of the times. Salmon's encounter with the 'Holy' seems to reinforce his tendency to passivity.

Salmon gives a brief account of his spiritual wanderings.[1] Something of a 'nomad,' he records that he was attracted to the Presbyterians but forsook them for Independency because of the "strictness of their (i.e., the Independents') forme," and because they were knit together in a more close and comfortable bond of love than any other. He implies that at some stage he was re-baptized. Then he came to think that he would give up his spiritual wanderings and build "a Tabernacle": he means by this an inward tabernacle. He had heard a voice speaking with him and saying, "Arise and depart for this is not your rest." So he was driven into a mystical way. He has already recorded his mystical inclinations:

> No sooner had I attained to any maturity in a natural understanding, of common principles of morality, but I found in myselfe a secret longing to sore in a more celestiall orbe; (Being partly convicted of a higher life than that of nature.)

---

[1] HID, pp. 8-24.

6/22

> This desire being kindled, and supplied with the timely breath of the Almighty, it soone begann to warme and afterwards to set my whole heart a flame, to which this day could never be extinct; but hath ever since (like the ambitious sparke) made its constant ascenscions, and earnest aspires, towards this heavenly center.[1]

This "ambitious sparke" now began to fly to and fro among the stubble of his former life:

> Loath, full loath I was to shake hands with form, and to leave the terrestrial image of Jesus Christ; yet so it was designed that hee must goe to his father, and . . . prepare a higher mansion in himselfe for me.

It seems that Salmon thinks with St. Paul that the ascended Christ cannot be any longer known in an earthly form.

Now Salmon recalls that he entered into a spiritual death for a while, but that, "When my 3.dayes (or set time) was expired, I begann to feele some quickening comfort within me; the grave stone was rolled away, and I set at libertie, from those deep and darke retires."[2] He was now filled with joy, and ecstasy followed. He claims a mystical ascent "into the bosome of the eternall Allmightines" for from thence he "sprang up farr above my earthly center, into a heavenly and divine enjoyment. . . ." He goes on: "Here I saw heaven opened upon me, the new Ierusalem . . . greeting my soule . . . ." To his enraptured gaze

> I appeared to me selfe as one confounded into the abyss of eternitie, nonentitized into the being of beings; my

---

[1] HID, pp. 8-9.

[2] HID, p. 14.

6/23

> soul spilt, and emptied into the fountaine and ocean of divine fulness: expired into the aspires of pure life.[1]

Salmon's very writing is breathless as he recalls this rapture. But even as the sparks fly upward, so it is the nature of earthly things to fall. Like Icarus:

> While with swift-winged ambition, we are transported into the sublimity of notion; the Scorching influences of the heavenly Splendor, meets us (as it were) with an untimely check; Singes the golden plumes of our soring fancies; and down we fal into unconceivable depths of darknes. . . .[2]

Alas!

"I was now sent into a strange land, and made to eat unclean things in Assyria; walked in unknown paths, and became a mad-man, fool among men."[3] For, harbored in his breast, as in that of all men, lay a hidden enormity. Candidly he admits that "the worst of men cannot outvie my iniquity. Hell it selfe cannot hatch that mischiefe, which my heart hath not been a receptacle to imbrace. . . ."[4] For he had delighted himself "in nothing but that which rendered me most vile and ugly in the sight of all men, and glorying in nought, but my own shame." These remarks, but a fraction of eighteen pages of remorse, lead to certain encouraging thoughts:

---

[1] HID, p. 16.

[2] HID, pp. 5-6.

[3] HID, p. 18.

[4] HID, p. 45.

6/24

> I was indeed full sick of wrath, a vial of wrath was given me, that I might drink. . . . Well -- drink I must, but mark the riddle. 'Twas given me, that I might drink, I drank that I might fall; I fell, and through my fall was made happy.[1]

Elsewhere, he adds:

> 'Tis true that I have lost a good name, and honorable esteem in the world. I have also another name, which is a new one, which none can read, but he that hath it.[2]

O felix culpa!

Thus it seems that where sin abounded, grace did much more abound. He feels that all things fall within the immensity of the divine Providence, and that, however bewildered a man might be by all that happens to him, he may yet rest content in the certainty that he lies in God's hand and that none shall pluck him thence. It was a matter of wonder to him, he says, that his secret and inward life was cherished while yet his flesh was so manifested. For now, the storm being over, he is now at rest, "safely arrived into the bosome of love, the land of rest."[3]

Though Salmon does not actually proclaim the doctrine that one should sin that grace might abound, this doctrine is not far away from his thought, and, indeed, finds expression in the work of his fellow arch-Ranter, Jacob Bauthumley.[4]

---

[1] HID, p. 24.

[2] HID, p. 31; cf. Revelations 2.17 & 19.2.

[3] HID, p. 26.

[4] cp. Bauthumley, Light and Dark Sides of God (1650), p. 31; cf. Ch. 7 of this work.

6/25 To conclude this outline of Salmon's writing, it remains to refer briefly to his intimations of a quasi-neo-Platonic philosophy of which so much mention has been made in this work. Then we must refer even more briefly to other points of doctrine.

Though Heights in Depths opens with a denunciation of human wisdom -- in the spirit of Everard and others -- the book continues by expounding a doctrine of the One and the Many, the Unity and the Variety: in language reminiscent of Sterry, Salmon writes:

> Here is nothing that truly is, because it abides not; things only appear to be, and so vanish. . . . We seem to live in a state of variety, wherein we are not truely living, but only in appearance: in Unity is our life: in one we are, from one indeed, we are no longer.[1]

The Reality, whatever it be, must be beyond, he concludes. Whatever it be, it cannot be reached by reason.[2] Here, then,

> While we perambulate variety, we walk but as so many Ghosts or Shadows in it, that itself being but the Umbrage of the Unity. . . . To ascend from variety into uniformity, is to contract our scattered spirits into their original center and to find ourselves where we were, before we were.[3]

How can we attain to this unity if reason will not bring us there? He answers that we wait on God's motion: "We must patiently expect its seasonable descension upon us; whose

---

[1] Salmon, HID, p. 2.

[2] HID, pp. 5-6.

[3] HID, pp. 2-3.

6/26 nature it is to consume us into it selfe, and to melt us into the same nature and likeness."[1]

Abandonment of reason, and emasculation of the sensuous world, are two concepts with which we are already very familiar. Familiar, too, is the extreme passivity which we find in Salmon. We noticed it in Boehme whose influence on Salmon we have already suggested. God will do all: let the soul lie malleable as wax and as inert. From this point of view it cannot be said that Salmon's outlook is truly neo-Platonic and Plotinistic: it is too passive. Plotinistic thought demanded effort and striving in the quest for the One through the active contemplation of intelligible things. Salmon teaches only surrender.

Heights in Depths contains also "A sinsere Abdication of certain Tenants, either formerly vented by, or now charged upon the Author."[2] In the course of this "abdication" Salmon leaves very unclear what it is that he has taught and what it is that he is merely accused of teaching. He refers to "certain writings" of his, writings which appear not to have survived and which appear to have contained teachings which caused him painful memories at the time of writing Heights in Depths. The latter work merely denies certain propositions:

---

[1] HID, p. 6.

[2] HID, p. 37.

6/27

> I am daily accused as one that holds these horrid opinions: That there is no God; no Devil; no Heaven; no Hell; as one that denies the Scripture, and the blessed Trinity of the God-head; that saith there is no Sin; or otherwise that God is the author of Sin.

At this point, Salmon owns the Scriptures as the inspirations of the Holy Ghost to holy men of old, and, in terms again reminiscent of Everard, "a history or map of truth." Such a position allows widely for allegorical or 'spiritual' interpretations.

Regarding his opinions concerning sin and evil,[1] his statement is deft:

> Some say I hold no sinn, and with the same mouth will be apt to conclude that I make God the author of sin: Here must need be a gross mistake on the one hand or other certainely.[2]

He admits, however, that some of his writings may lend support to the accusation, and where they do, he "recedes" them! Actually, such views were already in print in scholarly and respectable circles, such as we have noted in our references to Peter Sterry.

It would be an overstatement to say that, even in his recantation, Salmon is a whole-hearted embracer of orthodoxy. He demands, and takes, as much liberty of interpretation as skillful manipulation of words will allow, and irony often

---

[1] cf. "God hath nothing to do with anything that existeth not in himself." But, "The Divel, division, distance, sin, they are naught, stark naught. . . . I say not then that God is the Author of sin." HID, p. 50.

[2] HID, p. 47.

6/28

affects his comments on traditional doctrine as, for example, that of the Trinity: "Let the skilfull Oedipus unfold this," he says!

Although Salmon, in self-defense, resorts to cutting and scornful attacks upon the virtue and orthodoxy of others, his repentance reads sincere. Indeed, the entire character of his writing -- saving possibly that of A Rout, a Rout which resonates with the strident tones of the ranting prophet -- is rather superior. His elegant style, his clever use of adverb and unexpected adjective, his poetic imagery, enlist the sympathy of his reader.

If one holds in one's mind a picture of Ranters derived solely from material such as that surveyed in our first chapter, one is bound to be surprised by Salmon. Gentle, scholarly in temper, calm, inward and mystical, he does not fit the picture of the naked, swearing, and ribald antinomian Ranter. He provides us with an insight into the fact that there must have been a variety of Ranters, as there was of most other kinds of social and religious rebels. Yet, his surviving writings give us an incomplete picture, for we notice that he was found by Geo. Fox in prison with others who sound as if they were perhaps more at home in the pastures than in the study.

It is, in fact, hard to guess at the relationship between Salmon and these folk. He appears to have been their leader for they were released from jail after he himself had written

6/29 a letter of recantation. In fairness to them, however, it must be emphasized here that we do not know why his group was in prison. Was it for their beliefs and preachings, for their, perhaps speculative antinomianism? Or were they possibly licentious law-breakers who had shocked the respectability of their neighbours? We do not know. It may perhaps be fairly pointed out that two aspects of Salmon's nature have already been revealed in his writings: the quietist Seeker and the prophetic Ranter. These cannot be unrelated. He perhaps epitomized the adage, "Whatever thy heart findeth to do, do it with all thy might."

He despises human wisdom: but this is to become as a little child. He teaches passive surrender to God: but this is only to admit to a man's helplessness before the Almighty. In these teachings he is only a little extreme. If he taught that this world is but shadowy and insubstantial, he but followed a great philosophical tradition. And in stressing the inward divinity of man he but gave voice to a Greek and Christian tradition as old as the New Testament itself and widely taught in the world of mysticism and of inward religion. In fact, we cannot here distinguish what it was that set Jo. Salmon apart from other sectarian leaders and brought him the title of 'Ranter.' We cannot from this discover what 'Ranting' means in his case unless we are to draw the conclusion, from what Fox records as utterances of Salmon's followers, 6/30 that Salmon inspired, and perhaps taught, rabid amoralism. If he did, such was in harmony with the teachings of other Ranter leaders, as we shall notice. This in itself would be enough to brand him 'Ranter.' We might also find a clue in the letter to Thos. Webb, noticed in a previous chapter, which, as we have there remarked, might well have been written by Salmon.[1] The language, elaborate, slightly verbose, and vivid, is similar to known writings of Salmon. Of particular interest to us here is its postscript of curses.

This cursing sounds like a cultic or private language. Abiezer Coppe, mentioned in the letter, used to curse from the pulpit. It is too much to expect that we shall be able to understand it, though we may speculate. The phrase, "Eternal plagues consume you all, rot sink and damn your bodies and souls into devouring fire. . . ." is not altogether unlike Salmon's, "I appeared to myselfe as one confounded into the abyss of eternitie, nonentitized into the being of beings. . . ."[2] It is the nature of God's action, he says elsewhere, "to consume us into it selfe, and to melt us into the same nature. . . ."[3]

As for the following phrase, "The Lord grant that we may know the worth of hell, that we may for ever know heaven":

---

[1] Chapter I, pp. 45-46.

[2] *HID*, p. 6.

[3] *HID*, p. 16.

6/31 it is reminiscent of Milton's hero, Lucifer who would rather "reign in Hell than serve in Heaven."[1] This is the expression of Lucifer's rebellious pride. Milton knows that "the mind is its own place" and can "make a Heav'n of Hell, a Hell of Heav'n," a subjective notion which we noticed was found also in Everard, was further current in the thought of all the Ranter leaders, and may have been widespread among the sects which were alike in sharing doubts about traditional religious teachings. Did some Ranters feel themselves shut out of the Calvinist heaven? Did such try to realize their own salvation here and now? The author of the letter goes on to say: "For my own part I am ascended far above all heavens. . . ." -- the experience of a mystic exaltation. He implies that he has passed beyond such conceptions and teachings. How he has done so is explicated in the following phrase, ". . . yet I fill all things. . . ." The divine seed within has grown up and flowered. This man has passed out of himself -- or into himself -- and has been consumed into union with the all-pervading spirit. He knows this experience even now, in the Hell of this life. This seeker has become a finder -- a reward he wishes for his friends.

We may hazard the guess that if Ranter cursing was the expression of a deliberate inversion of traditional religious

---

[1] Milton Paradise Lost Book I, ll. 254f. It is known that Milton was working on Satan's speeches as early as 1642. cf. DNB 'Milton.'

6/32 attitudes and values, the expression of a total rejection of the traditional schema, then in Salmon (if indeed he himself cursed) it would not be entirely inconsistent with his inspired view of things.[1]

The strong immanentalism found in Salmon may have quite possibly issued in pantheistic doctrine, but, in any case, this immanentalism was quite in harmony with the pantheistic doctrine taught by other Ranter leaders. Salmon himself presents no systematic structure of thought.

The only extreme which we really find in Salmon lies in his ecstatic language. That people long for ecstasy is evidenced by the long history of cults which have sought this as their primary aim.[2] We can expect that many who heard Salmon were led on to a cultivation of some ecstatic experience. We are speaking here not of some elevated spiritual apperception, but of an excited emotional outbursting. We can easily imagine the excitement of people who believed themselves 'saved' by 'mystic union,' and who, therefore, had transcended all current religious frameworks. Exaggeration is the primary characteristic of such enthusiastic religious manifestations, and when this is applied to the elements intrinsic to Salmon's thought we can see how his teachings

---

[1] The phenomenon of cursing is discussed more fully in the chapters on A. Coppe and L. Clarkson.

[2] cp. Laski, Marghanita, Ecstasy (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1962).

6/33

may have resulted in Ranterism. Extremism in the abandonment of human wisdom leads to social insanity; extremism in quietism leads to spiritual moribundity; extremism in the notion of the insubstantiality of this world leads to abandonment of social responsibility;[1] and extremism in emphasis on man's divine nature leads to megalomania.[2] All of this results in madness, but even if divine, it is, like all madness, destructive. Such madmen are turned from Kings into Beasts -- no more Maries but Nebuchadnezzars. So Salmon himself found.

Strangely enough, Salmon himself seems to have recovered somewhat. He does not seem to have lost his faith or his security. It may be that he was a man of real and deep faith and spiritual experience -- one victimized by the madness of his time. He was able to survive both his own religious passivity (an element which naturally associates itself with defeatism) and also the collapse of the belief that he was 'godded.' Whether his followers were able to experience -- or to believe that they experienced -- Salmon's own type of mystical regeneration must remain open to question, but we

---

[1] So the 'Friends of God' "gave up trying to comprehend the incomprehensible universe and thus ceased to try to improve it. . . ." cp. Huehnes, op. cit., p. 29.

[2] "Unless safeguarded by limiting dogmas, the theory of Immanence, taken alone, is notoriously apt to degenerate into pantheism; and into those extravagant perversions of the doctrine of 'deification' in which the mystic holds his transfigured self to be identical with the Indwelling God." E. Underhill, Mysticism (New York, 1955), p. 54.

6/34 notice that "Salmonists" existed for another fifty years.[1] This points to the existence of a truly substantial, even if quietist, tradition in Salmonism, and may indicate that it was not only those Ranters who became Quakers who were saved from Ranterism,[2] but that Salmonists, too, were not irredeemable. In fact, they were probably "ranters of the sober kind."

Conclusion: Joseph Salmon

Salmon is essentially an immanentalist and a quietist. Most likely he represents Familism in its most characteristic form. His writings do not indicate that he was a pantheist, though what he has to say here and there is said in language which would not, in general, be disagreeable to a pantheist of an idealistic sort.

Yet it must not be forgotten that Salmon was a pneumatic enthusiast during an important formative period of his life, and that implies a strong consciousness of a personal deity who, though in himself beyond the world, yet fills men with spirit.

His relationship during that period to amoral and cursing libertine Ranters is not clear since there is a paucity of evidence. It is, therefore, impossible to determine with

---

[1] C. E. Whiting, op. cit., p. 278.

[2] R. Jones quotes Justice Durant Hotham's words to Fox, "If God had not raised uppe this principle of light and life, ye nation had been overspread with rantism . . . but this principle of truth overthrew ye root and ground of there (sic) principle," **Spiritual Reformers**, p. 210.

6/35 certainty the character of his inspiration. It may be that he passed through a wild period and then underwent a change back to the quietist type of religion more characteristic of him. In any case, because of the very loose relationship which in general appears to have prevailed between the arch-Ranters and their adherents, Salmon's teachings could well have been exaggerated to an extreme degree beyond his control and could have been mixed in with beliefs, attitudes, and practices, from other sources.

In his Familistic-type quietism and subjectivism Salmon represents within the Ranter stream the radical fringe of those elements: he "made a nose of wax" out of the Scripture; he rejected the Christian doctrine of an historical goal and end of history; concentrating on some sort of 'mystical regeneration' he dropped out any preaching of the Cross and proclaimed only the '*felix culpa*,' a doctrine rooted in the antinomianism of Free Grace. Though lacking that Christian hope which sees divine purposes progressively developed in history, essentially he appears to be optimistic about life and death, and here displays the optimism which tends to be a feature of immanental religious experience and becomes established in immanentalistic teaching. One might hazard the opinion that Joseph Salmon was both a better balanced and a happier man than the other arch-Ranters whom we shall consider.

6/36 In any case, he founded an apparently quite respectable religious sect which had a lifetime of more than a century. In this he was unique among the arch-Ranters.

Barthumley

THE
IOVIALL CREVV, 7
OR,
The Devill turn'd *RANTER*:

Being a Character of
The roaring Ranters *of theſe Times.*

Repreſented in a
COMEDIE,

CONTAINING
A true Diſcovery of the curſed Con-
verſations, prodigious Pranks, monſtrous
Meetings, private Performances, rude Revellings,
garrulous Greetings, impious and incorrigible
Deportments of a Sect (lately ſprung up a-
mongſt us) called *Ranters.*

Their Names ſorted to their ſeverall Natures,
and both lively preſented in Action.

London: Printed for *W. Ley*. ~~1651~~. 1650

CHAPTER VII

JACOB BAUTHUMLEY

> Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, all is vanity. . . . For that which befalleth the sons of men, befalleth beasts.

As with Joseph Salmon, little is known of the life of Jacob Bauthumley. George Fox met him in July, 1645, at Swannington in Leicestershire where there was a large meeting of sectaries of various sorts. He was, says Fox, "a great Ranter," and adds "but the Lords power stoppt him and came on ym all."[1] There seems to have been a considerable conflict between Bauthumley and the Quaker leaders. Surviving is a letter directed to Bauthumley by Ralph Farnsworth,[2] a principal Quaker, full of fume and gall in which the Quaker attacks Jacob Bauthumley's doctrine: the letter seems to be an attempt to put that doctrine on record.[3] Wm. Dewsbury, writing in 1655 and referring to this same meeting says, "the ranters cam to it and on of the higest of ym whos name is Jacob Botomley who wear burned through ye tong in ye army for sitting forth a book called ye light and dark sides of god. . . ."[1] and thus gives the only surviving indication that Bauthumley was ever in the army and that he, too, was a "ranting prophet." It can safely be assumed that he was not burned through the tongue only for publishing a book. This book was in fact published in 1650 and we shall survey its contents directly.

---

[1] G. Fox, Journal: a revised edition by N. Penney (London: Dent, 1924), vol. i, p. 151.

[2] Watson MSS. D, p. 162 (dd. 4 July, 1654). Friends Library, London.

[3] We shall mention this letter's allegations after surveying Bauthumley's writings.

It is possible that at some point Jacob Bauthumley moved to a Quaker position: Fox records that "iacob botemley did witnes that what I had spoken was the eternell truth."[2]

The last piece of information that we have about Bauthumley's life is given by Bauthumley in his Introduction to an attenuated version of Foxe's *Martyrology* published by Bauthumley in 1676. There he indicates that he was then Keeper of the Public Library at Leicester. Thus, whatever his history, he seems to have been eventually restored to respectability.

That Jacob Bauthumley was a devote of Jacob Boehme is evidenced by the unmistakable Behmenistic terms of the title of his book: *The light side* (*God, Heaven* and Earth) *the dark side* (*Devill* *Sin and Hell*.

---

[1] Friends House Transcripts, vol. i, p. 700; Bauthumley's *The Light and Dark Sides of God* is hereafter referred to as LDSG.

[2] Swarthmore MSS, vii, 171.

But, as we shall see, Bauthumley's mind was saturated with thoughts derived from many sources, and he does not clearly represent any one type of doctrine. It is consequently rarely possible to point definitely towards a particular influence in connection with any specific passage of his. Rather one may sense an influence or feel an amalgam of influences, some of which have been explored in the foregoing chapters. His assertion of the divine element in man he almost certainly owes to neo-Platonism, channelled to him through Familism on the one hand and the English Platonistic tradition on the other, though it is also possible that Stoicism--also undergoing a lively renaissance at this time--has also made its contribution. The pantheism derived also from these sources, one source materialistic and the other idealistic, has been modified by contact with Behmenism through which, indeed, pantheism's incipient ethical dualism has been extrapolated and intensified, though on an emotional rather than a metaphysical level. His antinomianism is also derived from these sources, for evil, in Bauthumley's thought, is "nothing," and sin is a figment of the imagination. The power of the English antinomian movement as described in an earlier chapter is also to be seen as, for example, in Bauthumley's statement that "sinne abounds that Grace may abound much more . . ." a calculated mis-statement of St. Paul.[1]

---

[1] LDSG, p. 31.

VII4 Interwoven with Bauthumley's outpourings of borrowed doctrines and second-hand opinions is the language of Christian faith providing endless and boundless inconsistencies which seem to bother him not at all.[1] With an insouciance sublime he has the temerity to quote on his title page the words of Christ: "I thank thee, O Father, Lord of Heaven and earth, that thou didst hide these things from the wise and understanding, and didst reveal them unto babes."[2] And for good measure he adds, "The spirituall man judgeth all things, and he himself is judged of none."[3]

It is, of course, the posture of those claiming to be "spiritual men" who may judge all things and be themselves judged of none which epitomizes the antinomianism found with Bauthumley and those with whom he associated, those "who travell with me in the same birth," as he puts it.[4] Bauthumley, however, affects to write in no proud spirit. The note of humility is rung all through his writing. He is not serving himself, he says, but is writing on behalf of those who are unable to arrive at an adequate presentation of their views and to "describe themselves." It is this which provides

---

[1] Sippell's contention that Bauthumley plagiarized Everard is dealt with in an Appendix to this chapter.

[2] Matthew 11:25.

[3] Cp. I Corinthians 2:15.

[4] LDSG, "Epist. to Reader." Is this perhaps a reference to Anabaptism?

VII5 him with motivation for writing and to "hold this Glasse before them." But, he affirms, there is yet another impulsion on this ready writer to take up the pen, that of the Spirit who imparts the gift of prophecy:

> And however, I do not looke that I, or any man else shall receive much by this, or any other Booke; which had almost perswaded me, to have been silent in this kind; yet was I inwardly forced thereunto, to ease the burden that lay upon my spirit. . . .[1]

His doctrine, he says, was "spiritually and secretly conveyed to me in the Spirit." Such is his authority, not holy Scripture: "I do not go to the letter of Scripture, to know the mind of God; but I having the mind of God within, I am able to see it witnessed and made out in the letter. . . ."[2] This is not a difficult process for him since, like Salmon, he makes "a nose of wax" out of the Scripture. He makes it clear that he realizes that others may not always receive his teaching sympathetically but he grandly says, ". . . it will be a Barbarian to them, and they to It. However, if I be beside them; yet I am not beside myself. (If I be it is to God.)[3] What Bauthumley's teaching was we must now briefly lay out.

God, he says, cannot be named: "Whatsoever thy Scripture or any man else speaks of thee, it is but thy meer condescension to speak to us in the language of men."[1] He adds, "God clothes himself with Titles and Expressions of Spirit, love, mercy, power, or whatsoever is amiable and high, to honour himself, and beget an high esteem and lawful respect from man."[2]

---

[1] LDSG, op. cit.

[2] LDSG, p. 71.

[3] LDSG, "Epist. to Reader," Cf. Paul, II Cor. 5:13.

God does not speak to men but in men: almost casually Bauthumley avers that there is nothing capable in man "of thy speaking and hearing but thy self." Thus, at once, Bauthumley expresses the belief that God is himself the inmost and only true reality. This is true not only of men indeed, but also even of "the ivey upon the wall."[3] Of itself, the creature is nothing at all. Thus, "If I say I love thee, it is nothing so, for there is nothing in me can love thee but thy self; and therefore thou dost but love thyself."[4]

---

[1] LDSG, p. 2.

[2] LDSG, _loc. cit_.

[3] LDSG, _loc. cit_.

[4] This thought is no novelty: one may compare the words of Madame Guyon:

> I love the Lord but with no love of mine,
> For I have none to give;
> I love the Lord--but with a love divine
> For by thy love I live.
> I am nothing, and rejoice to be
> Emptied and lost, and swallowed up in Thee.

Quoted by J. Hunt, _Essay on Pantheism_ (London: Longmans, 1866), p. 192.

VII7 What might be taken as a doctrine of mystical devotion is now hardened into a total denial of human freedom and of human moral and spiritual aspiration, for Jacob Bauthumley affirms that there are no free motions of the soul: ". . . this I affirm, that a man as man hath no more power or freedom of will to do evill then he hath to do good."[1]

Swiftly, so swiftly as to leave his reader gasping, Bauthumley deprives man of his birthright, for he is no longer "as God knowing good and evil." Bauthumley leaves us in no doubt that pantheism may swiftly give birth to an antinomianism based on passivity and amoralism. Like Molinos, he attempts to attain innocence by extinction of the will.

But he does not stop here for if man is no longer permitted to be man, neither is God permitted to be God, for, "God doth really dwell, and if you will personally; if he may admit to so low an expression in them (i.e., the creatures) all. . . ." The personality of God is dismissed: it is but a creaturely condition. The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is thus deftly stripped of his beard, and, as if this were not enough, Bauthumley adds the striking comment, ". . . and hath his Being no where else out of the Creatures."[2]

Here was an affirmation to shock the world! Aghast at the spread of such heresy, the Parliament had already issued

---

[1] LDSG, p. 2, Cf. p. 37.

[2] LDSG, p. 4.

VII8 forth the condemnation of those who said that the true God ". . . dwells in the Creature and no where else."[1]

Notwithstanding anything else which Bauthumley writes, if he stand by what he has written here he has rejected the totality of the Judeo-Christian tradition. The divine, he asserts, is totally expressed in Nature. All is divine: beyond Nature there is nothing. He seems almost to recognize the enormity of what he has written; he writes in justification:

> . . . whatever any Creature is, it is that as it is in thee . . . nothing hath a Being, but thy Being is in it . . . and therefore I cannot as I have carnally conceived, and as men generally do, that God hath his personall being, and presence in one place more than another, or that he hath a simple, pure, glorious, and intire being circumscribed or confined in a place above the Starres and Firmament, which the men of the World call Heaven.[2]

He says that he cannot accept the traditional teaching that all creatures, though the product of that Being, are yet distinct from him. The "spirit in me speaks otherwise," he writes. His assertion parallels that of Boehme, who writes, "If God made all things out of nothing then the visible world would be no revelation of him, for it would have nothing of him in it."[3]

---

[1] The Act of 9 August, 1650, previously quoted in Chapter I. LDSG appeared in print on 20 November, 1650.

[2] LDSG, p. 3.

[3] This translation quoted from R. Jones, Spiritual Reformers, p. 172.

VII9 Bauthumley then elucidates his doctrine further. Between man and beast there is no difference save that man carries "a more lively image of the Divine Being then any other Creature . . . in that Creature called Man, God appears more gloriously in then the rest."[1]

Man and Beast are but Fellow-Creatures! Starting from a very different point of view, Bauthumley has done what Hobbes did: he set man among the beasts that perish.[2]

It might be here objected that there is, however, an obverse to this presentation of this teaching. It is that Nature is divine, and that therefore all partakes of this divinity;[3] but this is scant compensation for the loss of one's human soul, and observers were not particularly impressed by the asseveration that a man is divine as a dog or a tobacco-pipe is divine[4] though perhaps slightly more equal than they!

The conviction that all is one and all divine must lead to a great indifference for how is one value to be distinguished

---

[1] LDSG, p. 5.

[2] Basil Willey comments on Hobbes in The Seventeenth Century Background (London: Chatto and Windus, 1934), p. 101.

[3] This doctrine is condemned in the previously mentioned Act of 9 August, 1650. This Act in fact condemns Bauthumley's doctrines item by item though it does not mention him by name. Of course, Bauthumley's version of these doctrines was not yet in print. It is virtually certain, then, that these teachings did not pertain to Jacob Bauthumley only: LDSG gives voice to doctrines already known to be, or feared to be, held by a good many. Bauthumley was scarcely an innovator.

[4] Cp. E. Hyde, A Wonder and yet no Wonder (London, 1651).

VII10 from any other? If Nature be divine and be all the divinity that there is, and beyond it there be nothing, then hope must be replaced by fatalism. There can be nothing beyond this world to justify it: no compensation for its failures and remedies for its disasters. This world must be its own justification, and it demands passive resignation rather than contentment with joy and peace in the Holy Ghost. As it was "too late for ambition" for those sensible of the "corruption and running down of the world" so, for those who had let the possibility of heaven slip away from them, there was no point in striving for aught.

In any case, a man's will was not free. To choose ends to strive for was to wallow in delusion. Deprived of his free will, a man is also stripped of the possibility of moral distinctions. A moral life is an unintelligible idea. There can be, therefore, no fear of judgment but also no hope of reward. It looks, though--and we have before noticed the Ranter preoccupation with the denial of judgment--as if the loss of promise was for them justified by the escape from fear of that Doom.

As we reflect upon all this it begins to appear that the Ranters' jolly "Christmas Carol" is not jolly at all:

> They prate of God, believe it Fellow Creature,
> There's no such bugbear, all was made by nature:
> We know all came of nothing, and shall passe
> Into the same condition once it was:
> By nature's power, and that they grossly lie
> They say there's hope of immortality;
> Let them but tell us what a soul is, then
> We will adhere to these mad brain-sick men.[1]

---

[1] Quoted in Chapter 1, taken from M. Stubs, The Ranters Declaration (London, 1650).

VII11 It is in this dismal spirit that Ranters would crown themselves with rosebuds e'er they were withered, and would that no joy of spring should pass them by: or in more earthy, Ranter, language:

> There is no heav'n to pleasure
> Which we enjoy with sweet content
> A short life and a merry
> Is all the heaven we expect,
> Let's drink off our Canary!

So they addressed each other as "Fellow Creature," and so they cried, "All is ours! All is well!"[1]

The cry "all is ours" is easily intelligible: it is the assertion of union with all in a common nature, and that divine. Ranters had inherited the earth!

"All is well" is more cryptic. Could it be a cry of resignation? Having relinquished all thought of punishment and reward after a Judgment, could men not now rest content with what they were and with what they had? Together with these slogans they called for ale and tobacco.

Cursing and swearing were likewise ways of asserting their freedom--freedom from dubious hopes and from less dubious condemnation. The God whom they had been taught to fear had been overthrown.

How had this come about? One part of the answer to this question lies in radical speculation. Such speculation was not novel: religion has always been pestered by speculators, and thoughts and questions, such as those of Bauthumley's were in no way new. What matters, and what affects the impact of a speculation is its motivation and the spirit in which it is made. It may be effectively used to undermine unpopular teachings, and disagreeable claims made upon the mind or conscience. Speculation is seldom innocent!

---

[1] G. Fox, Journal (Penney), i, p. 165.

As a source of exaggeration, untested and uninhibited by experience, it can be dangerous in its effect upon delicately balanced persons and institutions. It can become an idle pastime providing an alternative to decision-making, and thus a substitute for the cleansing and truth-affirming power of experience. In religion it has always been a popular activity among those anxious for new and perhaps exotic experience, serving in the stead of that experience. In the case of Bauthumley, pantheistic speculation likely served in the stead of profound immanentalistic experience itself. Bauthumley was not only a great Ranter, he was a great speculator.

Formal religion, he says, is a result of false imaginings about God, ". . . because men look upon a God, as being without them, and remote from them at a great distance, as if he were locally in Heaven, and sitting there onely. . . ." But Bauthumley himself knows better: "I am confident, that there is never a man under the Sun that looks upon God in such a forme: but must be a grosse Idolator, and fancie some corporall shape of him, though they may call it spiritual."[1]

---

[1] LDSG, p. 5.

VII13 Bauthumley sees himself as an iconoclast. Iconoclasm was in the air as it must always be at times of great social change.[1] As an iconoclast Jacob Bauthumley was riding a wave of fashion; he continues his speculations.

Already we have seen God robbed of his personality: it follows naturally that he should be deprived also of his passibility. In doing this Bauthumley followed both the Greek tradition of philosophy, strongly in evidence in England at this time, and also the doctrine expressed in Jacob Boehme's notion of the Ungrund: God is free from anger and from love and he neither loves nor hates one man more than another.

> However, the Scripture saith, Jacob have I loved, and Esau have I hated; it is but after the manner of men: for I cannot see that there is love or hatred in God, or any such passions: that which admits of degrees is not perfect.[2]

The abolition of the notion of Judgment, made necessary in fact by the doctrine of materialistic pantheism, is here justified on other grounds. He continues: "The being of both (Esau and Jacob) serve the designe of God." In the Behmenistic spirit he says they are complementary to one another, and to God, "light and darkness are all one. . . ."[3]

---

[1] Not long before this time John Donne wrote:

Eternall God--for whome do ever dare
Seek new expressions, do the circle square,
And thrust into Straight corners of poor wit
Thee, who are cornerless and infinite--
I would but bless Thy name, not name thee now. . . .

Quoted from J. Donne, "Upon the Translation of the Psalms by Sir Philip Sydney."

[2] LDSG, p. 9; Cf. p. 10.

[3] LDSG, p. 10.

VII14 It is to be noticed that whereas Bauthumley's speculations serve to dismiss divine Wrath, they are marshalled to preserve some notion of divine Love--though not the passion thereof. God is Love, a threefold love: "The first is God's Love to us, the second is our Love to God, the third is our Love to one another."[1] By the same Love that God loves us, we love Him, and we have communion with God when we have communion with one another. So that these three loves are one. In other words, God is Love and Love is God! Bauthumley manages to avoid the cult of divine Personality.

Divinity which has been stripped of personality and feelings, and which is indifferent to men's needs is not "God." It is a divine Nothing--the core of an onion! For Bauthumley, and for those who thought as he, God was dead! This decease was a consequence of a slipping over from mere immanentalism to pantheism, and that of a particularly rigid and doctrinaire variety. Even Salmon had a God, and preserved a sense of the Holy--as fascinans; but one does not encounter the mysterium tremendum at all in Bauthumley. God is not God: he has been dried out into a doctrine. Bauthumley is a religious bankrupt.

"Inwardness" is the keynote of Jacob Bauthumley's spiritual theme, and this receives full expression in his teaching on the nature of heaven. He seizes upon appropriate

---

[1] LDSG, p. 12.

VII15 Scriptural references in support of his contention that there is no objective location of a heaven and insists that the Kingdom of Heaven consists of a spiritual state of "righteousness, joy and peace in the Holy Ghost."[1] It is typical of his "spiritualizing" of Scripture that he argues long to show that Paul's being caught up into the "third heaven" was visionary experience only.

As the Familists, he argues that, as for Christ's true disciples, they are already in possession of the heavenly Jerusalem:

> The text does not say, we shall come to it hereafter; but that we are come to it, and that we have full and actuall possession of it, and so saith the Apostle, Our conversation is in heaven. . . .[2]

Unfortunately we are given no indication of the reaction of his followers to this disclosure--one that cannot have been altogether encouraging!

Bauthumley writes as one who knows the truth of what he writes. He is a "spirituall man"--one of the elite.

His view of the second-rate reality and worth of earthly things is apparent when he says, "And so heaven is his Throne and the Earth his Footstool; That is, God is in low and dark appearances, as well as in the most glorious. . . ."[3]

---

[1] LDSG, p. 14.

[2] LDSG, p. 16.

[3] LDSG, p. 18.

VII16 It becomes increasingly clear that Bauthumley's pantheism is shot through with dualism in the same way as that long tradition of Platonistic thought which lay behind him.

He does not say much about a doctrine of a Fall but what he does have to say shows that his view of it is not moral but metaphysical, and one might even add "gnostic" for the Fall lies in a loss of spiritual knowledge. He says that when man left God's light, and went to live in a self-being out of God, then his discoveries of God became dark and confused, and so brought him into bondage.[1]

Loss of knowledge is thus tantamount to loss of heaven. The curious thing is that God in us is already, and ever must be, in a state of spiritual perfection.[2] God's inward presence is, in a sense, one's true self. These thoughts are very reminiscent of Plotinus and his doctrine of the indwelling of the One, notions which we saw also in Joseph Salmon and in which a plain echo of Peter Sterry may be heard.

The perfection of knowledge of God may well not be achieved in this life, Bauthumley thinks, yet the disciples of Christ are already set free of "Administrations and Ordinances" and look forward to a time when God should "spiritually appear" in them. Then, says Bauthumley, they will be content with him to sit down and enter into eternal

---

[1] LDSG, p. 27.

[2] LDSG, p. 21.

VII17 nothingness, and to cast down their crowns at God's feet in everlasting silence.[1]

Such is the extremely negative conclusion of quasi-mystical speculation. It is a flimsy offering to earthy men of flesh and blood. The content of such teachings--if content there be--can be grasped by few spirits even among the highly educated, whether in a secular or sacred sense. One can by no means feel sure that Bauthumley himself knew what he was writing and even less sure that his ranting followers understood even a word. Possibly such language exercised an occult fascination for them similar to that exercised on the Philadelphians by the writings of Behmen and Pordage his English apostle. Yet we may note here a difference between Bauthumley and Behmen. Of the latter Koyre said that it was not knowledge that Boehme sought but Salvation.[2]

Bauthumley's Dualism

Inward religion, which is rooted in immediacy of feeling, tends to adopt a characteristic attitude toward the world of

---

[1] LDSG, p. 21. Bauthumley's jargon is evidently borrowed from popular knowledge of the Mystics: for example, Eckhart says--"Thou must love God as not-God, not-Spirit, not-person, not-image, but as He is, a shear, pure, absolute One, sundered from all twoness and in whom we must eternally sink from nothingness to nothingness." Quoted by R. Jones, Spiritual Reformers, Introduction, p. xxvii. He takes it from Pfeiffer, Meister Eckhart, p. 320.

[2] Nils Thune, The Behmenists and the Philadelphians (Uppsala: Almquist and Wiksells Boktryckerei Ab, 1948), quotes Koyré "Ce n'est pas la gnose que Boehme a cherchée, c'est le salut."

VII18 sense. Looking inward to the Real, it finds the outward world at most a mere husk, a phantasm or shadow of the Real.[1] Such an attitude easily becomes crystallized into a doctrine, one which may be held alike by those who have had the inner experience and by those who have not.

The materialistic and pantheistic form of religion taught by Bauthumley and possibly held in more refined, but certainly more gross, forms by others of his circle displays this tendency toward a metaphysical dualism (which leads easily to an ethical dualism). Some account of the spectrum of opinion among those called Ranters is given by John Tickell writing in 1651.[2] He seems to have gone to considerable pains to discover the truth about Ranter beliefs, and his book savors of careful reporting. Though the title of his account makes specific reference to Abiezer Coppe--the arch-Ranter with whom we shall next deal--one passage suggests contact with Ranters of the Bauthumley group. Tickell says that, "Some think that Everything is God, and so they speak plain, they say the Divel himself is God, as one told mee expressly that the Divel was God in darknesse.[3]

---

[1] E. Troeltsch, The Social Teachings of the Christian Churches, tr. Olive Wyon (New York: Macmillan, 1931), vol. ii, p. 732. This attitude was expressed by Peter Sterry also. See above Chapter 3.

[2] John Tickell, The Bottomlesse Pit Smoaking in Familism with Animaversions on Mr. Coppe's Sermon at Burford (London, 1651).

[3] Ibid., p. 51. Cf. the title of LDSG.

VII19 Some Ranters considered the creation to be but so many appearances of God, "God sporting himself in so many shapes."[1] We have seen how such an attitude toward the world was encouraged by the thought of English Platonism, and such a dualism may lead, says Troeltsch, not only to a severe ". . . asceticism which crushes all that is finite" but also to a "Libertinism which treats everything as equally indifferent."[2] Quakers and Ranters seem, in principle, to illustrate these two possibilities.[3]

An indifference which leads to libertinism (to invert Troeltsch) is patent in one Ranter attitude toward the body. Tickell asked a Ranter if he were God? His question was directed toward the body in particular. The reply was in the negative: a man's being, man qua man, is but an appearance. This appearance is not a "reall thing but apparent, as the image in a glasse of water, or the image in our fancie."[4] Such an opinion recalls the words of Sterry, "See thy self walking here as a wretched Ghost and Shade . . . ready every moment to vanish. . . ."

---

[1] Tickell, op. cit. This language is highly reminiscent of Peter Sterry and is extremely like that of Hinduism.

[2] Troeltsch, op. cit., vol. ii, p. 732.

[3] R. Baxter, Reliquiae Baxterianae (1696) ed. Lloyd Thomas (London: Dent, 1925), p. 73, wrote that the Quakers, "were but the Ranters turned from horrid prophaness and blasphemy to a life of extreme austerity. . . ."

[4] Tickell, op. cit., p. 52.

VII20 The status of the flesh, then, is very lowly. Though Tickell obtained the foregoing opinion from Coppe's followers, in Bauthumley we find a similar attitude: ". . . for as God is pleased to dwell in flesh, and to dwell with and in man, yet is he not flesh, nor doth the flesh partake of the divine Being." Then, perhaps pondering the doctrine of the decay and corruption of the world, he goes on to say that when the creatures have performed the design and will of God, ". . . they all shall return to their first principle of dust, and God shall as he did from all eternity, live in himself, before there was a World or Creatures."

Thus Bauthumley sees the world as some form of expansion of the Divine and looks forward to a contraction of it: ". . . so shall he to all eternity live and enjoy himself in himself, in such a way as no man can utter: and so I see him yesterday, and to day, and the same for ever. . . ."[1]

The Divine, referred to by a personal pronoun, is thus the Real Essence of all things. Bauthumley's dualism is only apparent, for the phenomenal world has no being of its own. All the manifold creatures of the world ". . . are but one intire Being. . ." not many different beings.[2]

---

[1] LDSG, p. 8.

[2] LDSG, p. 7. Cf. L. Clarkson, The Single Eye, all light and no darkness, p. 14. This doctrine was used by Ranters to explain how they could never commit adultery since one's wife was as all women and all women were as one's wife. Metaphysical speculation had its uses!

VII21 The consequences of the thesis that the spirit has being and the flesh has none are interesting. The inner spiritual element (which Bauthumley calls the soul) ". . . came immediately from God and is no other but of God, and if I may say further without offence, it is God . . . how then it should be impure I know not." To this assertion Jacob Bauthumley adds the following important phrase: ". . . for how the flesh should defile a spirit I cannot imagine. . . ."[1]

This doctrinaire and potentially dangerous speculation is the fruit of that philosophical tendency which not only undermines the actual reality of the physical world but also regards it with condescension. Combined with a pessimistic world-view like Sterry's which makes the body the soul's coffin, and with a Familistic-type megalomania which lets the "spirit" lord itself over the flesh, together with a feeling of the uselessness and pointlessness of the life in this world, it justifies at once an aggressive and petulant active antinomianism. It provides the occasion for the venting of frustrations--nihilistically and anarchically.

That this complex of ideas has a Manichaean complexion is not in itself surprising. Manichaeism--to judge by the many forms and varieties in which it has appeared in history--has had a persistent attraction.[2] We observed in the previous

---

[1] LDSG, pp. 49-50.

[2] Bogomiles, Paulicians, Cathari, and Albigensians covering a period of 700 years have been often supposed to be resurgences of Manichaeism, and there is no reason to suppose

VII22 chapter that Rosewell, the hostile commentator on Salmon's teaching, may have discerned a Manichaean flavor in it, and some form of dualism of a possibly Manichaean type was noticed by R. Farnsworth whose letter to Bauthumley in July, 1654, has been already mentioned. Since its contents are based upon Bauthumley's preaching rather than upon his published writings, it will be as well if we abstract the principal points here. We may thereby obtain a fuller view of Bauthumley's mind.

Although Farnsworth's letter is highly polemical, there is no reason to suppose that its contents are untrue. Nothing therein alleged seems to be inconsistent with what in general we know of Ranter teaching. "Thou said the acting of sin was not evil to thee, thou blind beast . . . Thou said there was no sin to him that did not imagine it to be evil. . . ." This assertion, though it appears in the writings of other arch-Ranters, does not appear so bluntly in The Light and Dark Sides of God, but it is easy to see the Behmenistic root and thus this assertion has an easy affinity with what

---

that the movement in its essentials died out at the end of the fourteenth century. Its essential teachings concerning the divinity of the inmost soul and the corruption of the flesh have made it a constant companion to religious movements having pantheistic and mystical leanings. Cp. S. Runciman, The Medieval Manichee: A Study of the Christian Dualist Theory (London: Cambridge University Press, 1947). The Bibliography is impressive and useful.

Méric Casaubon, Canon of Canterbury comments in his A Treatise Concerning Enthusiasm (London, 1655), on the Manichaean complexion of pantheism, reflecting his encounter with it in England; p. 123.

VII23 we have of Bauthumley's writings. Sin, for Boehme, has its being in "the false imagination" and has no true being. Boehme's metaphysical speculations are conjoined in Jacob Bauthumley with the endemic subjectivism of inward religion.

Pigments from Boehme's brush are to be everywhere seen in Bauthumley's portrait of the world, as for instance when he says, ". . . though men act in darknesse, yet God is there vailing his glory, and so they must needs sin; for sin is properly the dark side of God which is a meere privation of light."[1] Boehme's relative ethical dualism, however, appears to be exaggerated into deformity in Bauthumley's teaching as when, for example, Farnsworth asks him whether he be not responsible for evil actings. Several answers to this question have been already given, namely, that "Men can no more do evil than they can do good . . .,"[2] that when God veils his glory men ". . . must needs sin . . .," and that Good and Evil are concomitant complementaries, but Farnsworth now records another answer: "Yet thou would lay it only upon the evil and have the creature to be a beast or swine. . . . Thou said the creature was nothing; It was but the evil principle only that did the evil."[3]

---

[1] LDSG, p. 33.

[2] LDSG, p. 37.

[3] This alleged teaching bears striking resemblance to that of St. Paul in his Epist. to the Romans, Ch. 7. It is not our purpose, however, to launch into a discussion of possible dualism in the Pauline writings or the possible origins of it.

VII24 Here, one is led again to suspect the presence of a Manichaean dualism, one which is probably present throughout Bauthumley's thought and teaching. It has been superimposed upon that of Boehme and of the neo-Platonistic tradition. These teachings of inward religion provide a ready base for Manichaean thought. As St. Augustine has exemplified, neo-Platonistic influences which lend themselves to notions of degrees of reality--flesh below mind, mind below spirit, spirit above all--are very conducive to some type of Manichaeism. In short, as Sippell reminded us, many ancient heresies float up to the surface and to the light of day in mid-seventeenth-century England.

(Here, for the sake of completeness, we should add that, according to Farnsworth, Bauthumley, like other Ranters, indulged in swearing: "I asked if Christ taught thee to swear . . . and thou said thou could swear, it were no sin to thee." This is clear evidence that one motive for swearing, and we shall come to see that there was more than one motive, was simple assertion of the freedom of a divinely impeccable spirit).

Farnsworth concludes:

> Oh thou enemy of all righteousness. . . . Here art thou seen to be an enemy to God and blasphemed his way and his truth . . . Cursed art thou and all such; the lake is prepared for them . . . see thy confusion and filthiness; own thy condemnation to be just and stop thy mouth.

It is a forthright letter!

VII25 Traditionally Manichaeism has expressed itself asectically in its treatment of the disgusting flesh but this is by no means a necessary phenomenon, especially if one believe that the deeds of the imprisoning body cannot sully the divine element within. The ascetic element is absent from Bauthumley's writings but there is no pleading for libertinism either. Still, the way for such a line of development is well prepared and it is more than possible that Bauthumley's comments upon the figmental nature of sin and upon the impossibility of the body's sullying of the spirit were written in a context of actual libertine antinomianism practiced by others if not by himself.

As it is in a reduced and altered form that Manichaeism is found in Bauthumley's writings, so it is with Behmenism. Bauthumley has swallowed a few ideas and regurgitated them in a half-digested and debilitated form. The horror of the holiness of God nowhere appears, and the vehemence of the struggle between positive and negative, good and evil, light and darkness, is given no place. These contraries are reduced to mere concomitant complementaries. Boehme's universe is dynamic in nature--restless, questing, purposive. Bauthumley's is a dead, exhausted world. It is monolithic and passive. It is pervaded by an immense and puzzled silence.

English Behmenism was developed by the Rev. Dr. John Pordage (1607-1681), an Anglican priest.[1] Pordage provides a

---

[1] Towards the end of the seventeenth-century it blossomed into an organization of occult interests called the Philadelphian Society.

VII26 direct link between Behmenism and Ranterism since it is known that both the arch-Ranter Abiezer Coppe and also the mad Ranter Thomas Tany found shelter under his roof, Coppe in 1649 and Tany probably in 1650.[1] We may confidently expect that Boehme exercised a mediated influence on all the Ranter leaders, but in a moderated form. Thune mentions that Pordage (and thus we ourselves see Bauthumley after him) much reduces "the Dark" and modifies Boehme's original apprehension of the dreadfulness of God.[2] Bauthumley carries this tendency even further. The Dark Side of God is but flaccid negation, the absence of light. The Devil--also included in God's Dark Side--bears little resemblance to the magnificent but fallen Lucifer of Boehme's vision, being reduced to "the corruption of Nature . . . the old Man."[3] Hell, the Fire of God's Wrath in Boehme, is but, for Bauthumley, our present condition.[4]

The Antinomian Theme in Bauthumley

---

[1] Cp. DNB articles on Coppe and Tany. Dr. Pordage receives libellous mention in The Ranters Declaration (London, 1650), and the same story is repeated in The Arraignment and Tryall (London, 1650), though in this case the name "Pordage" had become "Buckeridge" apparently by way of "Pordich." Poor Pordage is represented as having a wife who dressed herself up in white (Adamitic?) and who insisted on gaily dancing the Hey!

[2] N. Thune, op. cit., pp. 40-47.

[3] LDSG, p. 29.

[4] LDSG, pp. 38-39. Bauthumley, as is his wont, makes no attempt to bring his various speculations into harmony. He here has forgotten that we have present possession of heaven, and that our conversation is already there.

VII27 Ranter antinomianism consisted of both theory and practice. It is naturally connected with ideas on the nature of evil and sin. Already we have mentioned themes which might be conducive to libertinism, namely, the belief in the divinity within, the illusory nature of the world, the idea of an independent agent of Evil "within me," Manichaean disgust with the flesh, pantheistic indifferentism expressed in the idea that "all beings are one being," and a distortion of the New Testamental idea of Free Grace into the form that "sin abounded that Grace might much more abound." To this we now can add Bauthumley's direct teaching on the nature of sin. He writes: Sin is nothing: it is the ". . . defect of Grace and a deficiency in the Creature. . . ."[1] From this it is deduced that, "Sin as Sin admits of no degrees for that which we call a great sinne, is no more then that which we call the least. . . ."[2] But Bauthumley displays a certain uneasiness as he surveys what he has written, and so goes on to stress that he has no desire to "lessen" sin but rather to expose the evil nature of it, which is a lacking of God's glory, a failing to "act in that divine Being," a "living out of the will of God." Yet, having said this, he asserts that even sin acts to God's glory, "for sinne abounds that grace may abound much more."[3]

---

[1] LDSG, p. 31.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Cp. Paul's words in his Epistle to the Romans, 5:20. ". . . but where sin abounded, grace did abound more exceedingly. . . ." A simple change of tense transforms the meaning of this sentence.

VII28 Bauthumley's passionless God ". . . is no more provoked by sin to wrath, then he is allured to blessing by any holiness of a people or person. . . ."[1]

Perhaps astonished and even alarmed by what he has written, driven by his profound spiritual insights and irrefutable logic, Bauthumley now hastens to add: "And whereas some may say, then men may live as they list, because God is the same, and all tends to his glory, if we sin, or if we do well: I answer them in the words of the Apostle: Men should not sin because grace abounds."[2]

It is fascinating to observe that even in the course of making this reservation, he feels bound to add, "yet if they do sin, that shall turn to the prayse of God, as well as when they do well."[3]

His strong pantheistic convictions seem to mesmerise our writer. He cannot allow that anything which God does not will can be. Sin serves to glorify God "as contraries set together illustrate one another. . . ."[4]

Bauthumley's abrogation of human responsibility--and thus of Law--is complete: God works all in all; sin has no reality; God is not wrathful and exercises no particular judgments.

---

[1] LDSG, p. 33.

[2] LDSG, p. 35. Cf. Romans 6:1.

[3] LDSG, loc. cit.

[4] LDSG, p. 36.

VII29 Whatever is unreal passes away and so judges itself, and this, by contrast, sets off God's glory.[1]

In conclusion one must inquire as to Bauthumley's view of the Atonement. His view was close to that of Peter Sterry, namely, reification of the world--inconsistent though this be with his speculation that God's Judgment (which rather surprisingly reappears in Bauthumley's mind) will "burn up" the flesh.

Having said that the Devil is but "the fleshly being . . . the corruption of nature"[2] he goes on, ". . . for whose destruction God is man'd in our flesh . . . God in us is reducing us againe to live in himself, and so the spirituall seed is breaking the head and power of the carnall. . . ."[3]

Again, as we noted in our chapter on the Familists, as religion becomes more and more inward, the Passion of Christ fades quite away. In Bauthumley, history and the world have been reduced to unreality, and men are but unhappy phantoms imprisoned in illusory flesh. He seems unable to ask, with the Psalmist, "Oh God, Why hast Thou made me thus?"

Bauthumley claims to be beside himself and indicates not only that he sees himself in a prophetic tradition, but as in

---

[1] He speaks of God's judgment not of sins or sinners but of "the flesh." God will burn it up. This signifies the passing away of the world of illusion and delusion.

[2] The use of the familiar phrase should be noted.

[3] LDSG, p. 28.

VII30 that tradition exemplified by St. Paul, claiming to partake of that same divine madness and that same liberty of the Spirit, for he claims the Spirit's authority also. There are reminders of Paul's letters all through Bauthumley's Light and Dark Sides of God as in other Ranter literature--here a quotation, there a suggestion--and the theme is always of the Spirit. But the doctrine of spiritual freedom and authority is carried to an extreme recognizable in type as that indulged in by the much rebuked Church at Corinth. The Ranters, like the people in Corinth, perhaps failed to "try the spirits" whether they were of Paul's God. It seems, however, that they did not really care about that. Actually, of the wildness of spirit which we shall notice in the persons of Coppe and Clarkson, none is discernable in Bauthumley or, it will have been noticed, in Salmon either. The latter's writings breathe transports of exaltation and perhaps might justify a claim to divine madness. But even this is absent from Bauthumley. His work is preoccupied with doctrine, not experience, with words, not Spirit. If it was as an enthusiast that Bauthumley shrinkingly put forth his tongue to the iron, little of that spirit communicates itself in his writing. He prates of Spirit but the power is not in him. His work is the epitaph for a dead God and dead religion.

Before entering upon some kind of concluding summary of Bauthumley's personality and thought, it is necessary to enter briefly upon a bye-road.

Stoa and Conventicle

Bauthumley's brand of materialistic pantheism was not the first to appear on the English scene. Its more illustrious precursor was a revised Stoicism. This ancient and noble philosophy which in Roman times served as a refuge when the absurdities of the ancient gods had become plain to intelligent men, revived itself in the Renaissance, for its vision of a wondrous divine Spirit self-expressed in a wonderful Nature became again very relevant when men like Bruno, moved to new doubt and new belief by the New Science, might exclaim as he that, "Nature is God in things."

It is interesting to note that the Works of Lucian of Samosata (c. 115-c. 200) "the blasphemer" and "the laughing philosopher" who cheerfully derided superstition both Christian and Pagan, went through two editions in the London of 1635. Almost inevitably, although ten years later, appeared Lord Herbert of Cherbury's De Veritate, setting off a percussive chain of rationalistic writing culminating (in the seventeenth-century) in John Locke's Reasonableness of Christianity (in 1695), and John Toland's Christianity not Mysterious (in 1696). Although the works of Lucretius were not translated into English before 1683, they were widely read before this, and Stoic ideas were well-known even by those unable to read such works themselves.[1]

---

[1] George T. Buckley, Atheism in the English Renaissance (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1932), p. 16, et passim.

VII32 "Stoicism made for rationalism because it laicized morals, removed them from the church, and placed them in the sphere of reason."[1]

It is not our intention here to concern ourselves with rationalism *per se*, for we note its presence only as a symptom of failing religious belief. But we are concerned with Stoicism, and thought rooted in it, as providing respectable refuge for doubters of traditional religious creeds and codes.

The rather mournful tone of Stoic thought was in tune with the pessimism resulting from the advent of the New Science. As we have already seen, the New Science tended to undermine belief in the conventional Christian idea of God and to promote pantheism. But when pantheism is chosen as an alternative to monotheism it is, effectively, atheism. A Universal Spirit that is beyond personality, and beyond form and name, cannot be said to be a god, nor yet God--in

---

A useful study of the central figure of Renaissance Stoicism is that by Saunders, *Justus Lipsius: The Philosophy of Renaissance Stoicism* (New York: Liberal Arts Press, 1955), a Columbia University doctoral thesis; an excellent Bibliography is provided on pp.221-224.

All through the sixteenth century the works of Marcus Aurelius, Cato, Cicero, Epictetus, Plutarch, and Seneca went through dozens of editions, and the seventeenth century saw continual attacks on "the atheists" Epicurus, Aristotle, Lucretius, etc. Méric Casaubon's *The Originall Cause of Temporall Evils* (1645) was well known, and Stillingfleet's *Origines Sacrae, or a Rational Account of the Grounds of the Christian Faith . . .* (1663) had gone through four editions by 1675, and eight by 1709. Cf. Tuveson, *Millennium and Utopia* (New York: Torchbooks, Harper and Row, 1964), p. 159f.

[1] *Ibid.*, p. 18.

VII33 the usual way in which that word is used. Stoicism promotes belief in such a Spirit; it preserves religious feeling in a sense of the wonder and mystery of the world, while permitting a neutral attitude on the nature of the mystery. Naturally, its adherents are encouraged to reject all traditional divine images.

With its dismal view of man as in the grip of an irrevocable Destiny, making all his struggles useless, Stoical philosophy chimed harmoniously into both the predestinarian sonorities of Calvinism, and the fatalism of those who had lost any sense of having directional control over their lives. This lostness of spirit supervenes quite quickly when verities that are already half-doubted are directly attacked from a base of strong and convincing contrary evidence--such as the New Science appeared to be.

Why do we speak of half-doubted verities? We have already noticed that the Stoic works of no less than six authors were already widely read in sixteenth-century England. It happens that this materialistic monism was itself not the only monism to be present on the scene! The sixteenth century had also seen the arrival on British shores of the thought of Averroes. The details are obscure. It may have come from Italy by way of France and in the form given it by Pomponazzi, a form which denied all traditional forms of belief in the supernatural. Attacks on Averroism were made in England in the fifteen-thirties and fifteen-forties. Two of Latimer's

VII34 sermons mention those who deny immortality.[1] Averroes' thought contained a curious co-mixture of Aristotelianism and neo-Platonism. He taught, among other things, the eternity and potentiality of matter, and--very interestingly--the unity of the human intellect, monopsychism. This doctrine implied that only one intellect exists for the whole human race in which every individual participates, to the exclusion of personal immortality. Although we have suggested that Bauthumley's doctrine that all the manifold creatures of the world "are but one intire being . . ." not many different beings is probably derived or deduced from Boehme, it is possible to hear a distinct echo of Averroism. But who can be very sure of such things when the echoes of many different voices echo and re-echo in the chambers of memory, some amplified, some muted, and some garbled together in unintelligible cacophony?

Against such an historical background of idealistic monism and monistic materialism, the presence of which, be it remembered, witnesses to scepticism about Christianity, the form of Bauthumley's curiously laminated thought need occasion no surprise. The co-lamination of neo-Platonistic, Behmenistic, and Stoic notions can be achieved quite easily by an opaque and cloudy mind.

A particular, if superficial, similarity between the language picked up by Bauthumley and that of Stoicism is the

---

[1] *Ibid.*, pp. 29-30.

VII35 language of Nature. Stoics believed that Nature expressed the Divine, that Truth was writ large in Nature for all to see.[1] The wisdom of the good man consisted in conformity to Nature: "Live according to Nature" is a Stoic maxim. But the Stoic interpretation of this maxim was somewhat different from that put upon it by the Ranters. Stoic ethics were ever noble and demanding and were based on reason rather than upon airy notions of inspiration or upon intuition. Nature, in her beauty and order, expresses Law which is of the divine Substance, and the Law which reason sees in it is the Law of duty.

For though Stoicism saw man in the toils of a destiny prepared for him it did not see a man as thereby excused from the responsibility of choice: his will was free, and he was Captain of his Soul. A man needed to subject himself to training and discipline for the higher ends of life--duty, honor, and service to others. Epictetus saw this service to others as the work of love.

Seneca, under the influence of the persistent Persian puritanism, describes the body, the flesh, as a mere husk and fetter of the soul.[2] This was a common opinion in the

---

[1] Cp. Romans, Ch. i.

[2] "Stoicism" is a term designating a general climate of thought generated by a succession of thinkers--each bringing a contribution colored by his own personality and experience. Dogmatic consistency is not to be found. Bauthumley's comment in LDSG, p. 43, is not inconsistent with certain Stoic doctrine. He says that since the human race left God for its own self-being it is now in Hell, there to remain until the

Hellenistic age, but it did not altogether undermine the sense of the importance of life. True though it is that the widespread pessimism in Hellenistic thought and feeling manifested itself in a sense of the futility of life, Stoicism paradoxically balanced this with a sense of life's importance. The material aspect of Being witnessed to the spiritual, and indeed manifested it. To struggle within the bonds of the world and the flesh was human destiny. It did not altogether matter for a man if comprehension of his life's history eluded him: he must accept his lot with resignation. This surrender to Fate was, in fact, a man's refuge from life's artillery. The values of an ethical life were not impugned by the mystery of the struggle and of the end: such values were vindicated in the experience. Indeed, our friend Muggleton--Stoic though he was not and odd sort of fellow though he was--provides a good example of Stoical ethics. He came to think that Virtue was good in itself even if there were no God to reward it or to punish the breach: "Therefore I was loath to let go my Integrity, but kept close to it; . . . I was resolved to keep it to the End, if there were nothing after Death. . . ."[1]

Judgment when God will "burn up the flesh." Stoics held a similar doctrine of the purification of the world: Cf. E.L. Tuveson, Millennium and Utopia (New York: Harper and Rowe, 1964), Ch. 5. Note that Bauthumley's hazy ideas of Judgment do not refer to individual judgment for sin, a concept which has no place in his or any Ranter writing.

[1] L. Muggleton, Acts of the Witnesses (London, 1699), p. 19.

VII37 Stoic materialism is interesting because it manages to preserve a sense of the profundity of the universe. Stoicism materializes Spirit but permits Matter to own the attributes of it.

Most of this is in marked contrast to the claustrophobic and suffocating materialism evinced in Bauthumley. Resigned, though Stoicism was, it was not frankly depressed! And the Stoic was resolved to be a full man: bleak though the outlook might be, he would not relinquish the struggle to be, and the struggle to do what was right. Not for him to jettison his responsibilities and to foist the blame for his failings on to the divine Spirit which gave him forth! The Stoic, unlike the Ranter, held up his courage and his head.

Thus, while it is more than merely possible that Ranterism absorbed something from Stoic ideas, that something was a mere superficiality. Ranters knew that all came of Nature but had forgotten what Nature might be or might become.[1]

---

[1] R. Burton, in his Anatomy of Melancholy (1621) (London: Vernor, Hood, and others, 1801), p. 379, comments on these atheists who, he asserts, insofar as they ascribe all things to Nature and to Chance in fact ascribe them to God for whom "Nature" is nothing more than the ordinary means by which the Almighty displays his power, and "chance" the mere effect of his unrevealed will. . . ." He sings:

> They think that Chance rules all, that Nature steers/The moving seasons, and turns round the years:/They run from shrine to shrine, and boldly swear,/But keep no faith, because they know no fear.

On the previous page he writes: "An Atheist, indeed, must ultimately feel the keenest miseries"; for while, like the reprobate Barnardine, he "apprehends death no more dreadfully than as a drunken sleep; equally careless, reckless, and fearless, of what is past, present, and to come; insensible of mortality, yet despairingly mortal," he "squares his life to

VII38 If, indeed, Stoicism lent Ranterism something, we have here another example of how distorted and debilitated forms of a noble idea or difficult notion might filter through simple minds and in a crass form become further disseminated.

Summary and Conclusion

It is difficult to gain a clear picture of Jacob Bauthumley as a personality and as a theoretician. His writing, calm and unhurried, gives no indication either of passion or of the rich religious sense to be felt in Salmon nor yet of the excitement which we shall notice in Abiezer Coppe. He registers no impact of the Holy. We know him as an Army preacher whose tongue was bored through, as a spokesman at Swannington for those who were designated "Ranter" by Quakers, and as the town Librarian at Leicester. Like Joseph Salmon, he seems to have passed through phases as did many a sectarian. The emphasis in all he writes is on speculative doctrine, and he

---

the narrow limits of his mind, and exhibits in his conduct a corresponding course of selfish profligacy and daring vice; and vice and profligacy are always miserable."

Even Richard Baxter was not unaffected by the stirrings and the doubts of his times. He recalls that "The Tempter strongly assaulted my faith, and would have drawn me towards infidelity itself. . . ." He was forced to dig to the very foundations of his faith and came to find that nothing is so firmly believed as that which has been sometime doubted. He came to think atheism a madness, and rejected the notion that the world might be accidentally the result of the conflux of irrational atoms. Cp. Baxter, op. cit., pp. 26-27. Perhaps even the famous doubt of Descartes should be seen as a symptom of these uneasy times.

VII39 seems to be neither a theist nor a truly convinced pantheist. He uses Christian language here and there, presumably because for him this is the language of religion. He has no other. In fact, he displays no sense of the reality of the historic Christ and so none of the Passion. He is unmoved and uninterested in the Christian doctrine of Atonement for sin. It is, in fine, very hard to see him as a religious personality. Like the deity which he describes, he is characterized by apathy, and for him there is a great pointlessness to everything. His pantheism is merely speculative and not--apparently--derived from immanental experience: his doctrine is spiritually dead.

For unrooted and meandering persons his teaching can have given neither security nor direction. In what, then, lay its attraction if he had followers? In fact, we do not know that, as an individual, he had followers. We see Bauthumley active in a loosely-knit movement but we do not know that he was a founder or an inspirer of it. We have seen that his doctrines were already in circulation and were known to Parliament before he himself appeared in print. It is possible that he was in some degree a product of the movement; it is sure that he was a product of the same forces that produced the movement itself. It seems likely--since he hardly fits the part of originator and inspirer--that he drifted into the movement like Laurence Clarkson, another arch-Ranter.[1]

---

[1] See Chapter IX.

VII50 But if Bauthumley had followers it was probably because he does, in however badly and confused a manner, what he says he is doing, namely,he serves as a spokesman for those who are unable to express their thoughts. It is my purpose, he writes, to hold ". . . this Glasse before them . . ." to help them ". . . bring forth out of their mouths which may lye in the bottome of their hearts."[1]

In fact, his attenuated Behmenism, distorted by his own radical passivity, is likely only to have confirmed his admirers in their depressed confusion. He gave form to a fear that really, man was like the beasts that perish; but, having Muggleton in mind, who feared the Resurrection and the Judgment, we see that this fear may have been half a hope. Bauthumley saw man and beast as fellow-creatures, and, like the other arch-Ranters, gave no credence to the doctrine of the resurrection of the flesh. His notions of the soul were also very confused but, on balance, he seems to have believed, or to have wished to believe in, an inward divine nature, lacking individuality, which would finally merge into an eternity of silence. Passivity, retreat, and silence were the hall-mark of his teaching as of Joseph Salmon's.

Contrary to the implications of his book's title, the "Light Side of God" seems hardly to appear: he offers no day-star to triumph over the shades of night. In his stressing

---

[1] LDSG, "Epist. to the Reader."

VII41 of the inward divine reality and his diminishing of the world of sense he emasculates the human personality. When Bauthumley says that ". . . there is nothing in me can love thee but thy self; and therefore thou dost but love thy self . . ." perhaps it could be argued that he is expressing a profound spiritual doctrine uttered by Hans Denck and later expressed in the famous words of Pascal, "Apart from God no one can either seek or find God, for he who seeks God already in truth has him."[1]

The similarity between Jacob Bauthumley's teaching and that of Pascal is superficial. Pascal, as Denck before him, expresses his feeling for God's all pervasive Grace, Presence, and Sovereignty but, unlike Bauthumley, he does not abrogate the human will and person entirely. Pascal was, after all, a man of some profundity who knew the interior warfare of the Spirit. He himself suffered a "definitive conversion" and his religion was based upon the Person of Christ as Savior with Whom Pascal believed himself to have had an encounter. Though Bauthumley's contemporary, and though some forms of expression may be said to be similar, the two men could hardly be further apart. For, by all appearances, Bauthumley was able to indulge in speculation unimpeded by spiritual experience, and was led on and away by the fashions in thought.[2]

---

[1] Quoted by R. Jones, Spiritual Reformers, Intro., p. xxx.

[2] The following passage taken from W.K. Jordan, The Development of Religious Toleration in England (Cambridge,

VII42 Abrogation of the human will was not, of course, the characteristic of pantheists only, for there were many Calvinists who also thought and believed so. Yet Calvinists lived in the light and shadow of a Living God in whose fear they trembled but in whose mercy they trusted. Not only did Bauthumley, and those of his ilk, dissolve the claims of this God upon them, by means of the solvent of Free Grace, but they despised his Image and threw it down. For them, God was dead, or they pretended to themselves that he was! It will be remembered that Wm. Perkins had said that the consciousness of sin in the mind led the sinner to imagine that "there is no God," and to the denial of hell and judgment,[1] an analysis borne out by Muggleton's testimony that his friends, oppressed by the fear of hell, said, "There is no God but Nature only." That Bauthumley and his friends had need of recourse to a doctrine of Free Grace indicates that Perkins' words are appropriate here.

Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1938), p. 227, serves to illustrate one aspect of religious thought at mid-seventeenth century: Lawrence, directing the debates for the moderate party, at the trial of J. Nayler before Parliament December 6, 1656, Government spokesman therefore, said that "Nayler claimed to be Christ." In a sense this might be true, for "is not God in every horse, in every stone, in every creature." If Parliament hangs every man who says, "Christ is in you the hope of glory," you will hang a good many." "These arguments," comments Jordan, "might a generation earlier have brought the speaker before an ecclesiastical court in defence of his own life. So far had this type of thinking spread."

[1] Cp. Chapter V above.

VII43 But in dismissing their Judge, these Ranters lost also their Saviour, for Bauthumley's quasi-Behmenistic picture not only deprives the Divinity of personality but removes the possibility of petitionary prayer.

The extreme passivity and dispirited character of Bauthumley's incondite and turgid work--not unlike the writing of H.N.--leads one to suspect that he represents the dregs of quietism, such as is described by Wm. Penn who talks of those who "waited together in silence" but who "ran out in their own imagination" and "brought forth a monstrous birth." These people had lost their nerve and became spiritual paupers.[1]

The confusion of thought and feeling in Bauthumley's writing is manifest, and indicates to us an important element among the factors that generated Ranterism. Inconsistencies between reason and emotion are common to most men, and we have noticed it in some of those we have looked at in the course of this study. We noticed that it reached a rather acute form even in one like Sterry who was possessed of a good mind and who benefited from the disciplines of philosophical training. For example, though postulating that Evil was nothing he made God responsible for it; and though insisting that God was in all things, he found the body "corrupt flesh" and a barrier between man and God. Bauthumley is closer to the run of ordinary men--those who have mastered grammar but have no pretensions to scholarship. As such he demonstrates rather clearly the effect made upon many ordinary men by the confusion--even chaos--of the times. Traditional certainties were no more, and speculation filled the vacuum that nature abhorred. So Bauthumley's role was cast for him.

---

[1] The misery of the spiritual pauper is well exemplified in the following passage taken from the Experiences in the Life of Mary Penington, born c. 1634: It is taken from R. Jones, Mysticism and Democracy in the English Commonwealth (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1932), p. 98. "She had rejected all sacraments and ordinances and external Church, "but she could not by her seeking find any constructive way of life. Her pathetic testimony sounds very modern: "I know nothing to be so certainly of God that I could shed my blood in defence of it." In this defeated state of mind she tried to find relief in "the excesses and vanities" of London society. "Yet," she wrote, "in all this excess of folly I would say to myself, what is all this to me? I do these things because I am weary and know not what to do."

Although his writing does not betray very much emotion, Bauthumley's preoccupations disclose the anxiety associated with such uncertainties as those about the love of God, the meaning of man, the authority of the Bible, the significance of evil and man's blameworthiness for sin. Thrashing about in these entangling problems he feebly attempts to cut his way free with the knife of nihilism. He attempts to divest Divinity of personality but cannot free himself from the use of personal pronouns; with Zeno and Bruno he wants to say that "Nature is God in things" but simultaneously declares that the Creature is nothing; having that man is but a shadow, he also wants salvation for him in "Eternall silence." He asserts that evil has no being but points to it as a force working within. Like Sterry, he abhors the flesh and looks

VII45 to the day when God will burn it up. He is unable to produce a coherent, even if speculative, pantheism not so much because he is a fool but because his unconscious attitudes will not quite let him go.

He is thus a wandering speculator entangled, as he entangled others, in his destructive speculations. If we wish to characterize him in a word we might call him a "ranting Behmenist," a fair label so long as it is remembered that Bauthumley used Behmen only as a base for operations, that thereafter, he is "run out" into the perplexing and vexatious wilderness of his own mind.

APPENDIX TO CHAPTER VII

In his book, *Werdendes Quäkertum*, in which he explores some of the religious elements surrounding the rise of the Quakers, Sippell gives some space to Jacob Bauthumley and to Joseph Salmon. In his brief comments on Bauthumley's work he says:

"Everything is practically plagiarized from John Everard." And when Jacob Bauthumley follows Everard he does so ". . . with the air of one who is above such childish ideas, boasting of his own spiritual superiority. He overrides Everard's subtle paradoxes, and from his panentheism draws forth crass pantheistic consequences."[1]

Sippell's somewhat disparaging view of Jacob Bauthumley seems fully justified. We have noted that Bauthumley gives no impression either of intellectual power or spiritual gift. It is a rather grim commentary on the state of Ranter leadership when **Sippell** remarks, "Jacob Bauthumley is the most spiritually significant leader of the Ranters."[2]

---

[1] Sippell says: "Alles . . . ist beinahe ein Plagiat an John Everard." And when Jacob Bauthumley follows Everard he does so ". . . mit der Miene des über solche kindischen Vorstellungen Erhabenen, der sich dabei seiner geistigen Überlegenheit rühmt. Er übersteigert noch die schroffen Paradoxien Everards, aus dessen Panentheismus zieht er krasse pantheistische Konsequenzen. . . ." Cp. T. Sippell, *Werdendes Quäkertum* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1937), p. 92.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 95.

VII47 Viewpoints which were characteristic of Everard are certainly found in Bauthumley, namely, subjectivism displayed in the interiorization of Scripture, the assertion that God turns evil to his praise, the actual unreality of evil, his tendency--under neo-Platonic influence--to belittle the importance of the actual world, and a modalistic interpretation of the Trinity.[1] But it must be remembered that Everard attempted to maintain a balance, albeit an uneasy one, between such intellectual postures and his Christian feelings. To him it was important that Christ lived and died for men. He had a sense of history and preserved a sense, likewise, of God's lordship over it. He tried his best, though perhaps unsuccessfully, to hold together the Christian doctrines of divine immanence and transcendence.

Sippell seems to base his belief that Bauthumley plagiarized Everard on internal evidence. Actually, Everard's Gospel Treasures Opened was not published until 1653, but Bauthumley's Light and Dark Side of God in 1650. There is no evidence of copies of Everard's sermons being available in any form before 1653 though it is possible that they were circulated in Manuscript. It is also possible that Bauthumley heard Everard preach. Perhaps Bauthumley was influenced

---

[1] That Bauthumley should include in his work any doctrine of the Trinity is anomalous. But, in fact, he seems to be prepared to play about with any type of doctrine that for the moment takes his fancy. His interpretation of the Trinity, in fact, has no bearing upon the rest of his thought.

VII48 by books which Everard studied and translated, e.g., the Theologia Germanica in 1628; Cusanus' Vision of God in 1646, and the works of Hermes Trismegistus (of uncertain date but during Everard's lifetime). However this may be, Everard's published works are a clear expression of current doctrines of which Jacob Bauthumley's version is a debilitated form. It cannot be established that Bauthumley is directly dependent upon Everard in any point.

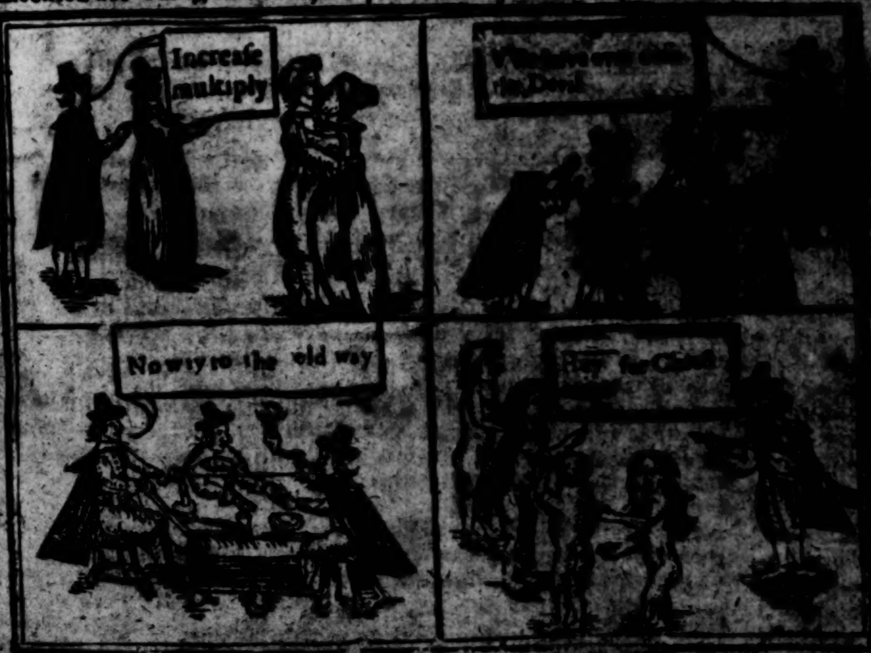
Coppe

The Ranters Declaration, 2

WITH

Their new Oath and Protestation; their strange Votes, and a new way to get money; their Proclamation and Summons; their new way of Ranting, *never before heard of*; their dancing of the Hay naked, at the white *Lyon* in Peticoat-lane; their mad Dream, and Dr. *Pockridge* his Speech, with their Trial, Examination, and Answers: the coming in of 3000, their Prayer and Recantation, *to be in all Cities and Market-towns read and published*; the mad-Ranters further Resolution; their Christmas Carol, and blaspheming Song; their two pretended-abominable Keyes to enter Heaven, and the worshiping of his little-majesty, the late Bishop of *Canterbury*: A new and further Discovery of their black Art, with the Names of those that are possest by the Devil, having strange and hideous cries heard within them, *to the great admiration of all those that shall read and peruse this ensuing subject.*

Licensed according to order, and published by *M. Stubs*, a late fellow-Ranter.



Dec: 17 Imprinted at London, by J. C. MDCL. 1650

VIII1

CHAPTER VIII

ABIEZER COPPE

Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of Hosts.

The Angel lifted up his hand and swore by Him
who liveth for ever and ever.

The "Great blasphemer," Abiezer Coppe, who preached naked, and cursed the while, was probably the most widely known of the arch-Ranters.

This man, the son of Walter Coppe of Warwick in Warwickshire, was born 20 May, 1619.[1] He was admitted to All Souls College, Oxford, in 1636, and passed thence to Merton where he was placed under a good tutor. He was known to "entertain for one night or more, a wanton huswife (sic) in his chamber." Stopped while taking food to his rooms after Hall, it is remembered that he said that ". . . it was a bit for his cat."[2]

---

[1] This brief general account of Coppe's life is largely based upon that given by Anthony à Wood in Athenae Oxoniensis (ed. of 1817), vol. iii, pp. 959f. and 1099. This account is scarcely a friendly one! Quotations are taken from this source unless otherwise identified.

[2] This spicy little reminiscence reminds one that Anthony à Wood should be taken cum grano salis.

On the outbreak of the Civil War he went down sans degree and "adhered to the blessed cause." At first he was "a Presbyterian, and then an Anabaptist, a Ranter, a Muggletonian, and what not."[1] The stage of his villainies was Warwickshire, says Wood, where he is said to have baptized seven thousand people. He bragged about this.[2]

Subsequently, as a Ranter, he preached stark naked and blasphemed, and at night he was drunk and went whoring with some girl taken in by his preaching.[3] His preaching was larded with invective and curses, and he is said to have cursed and blasphemed for an hour in the pulpit of a noted church in London! "By God's wounds I shall be saved," is an example. Sometime in an inn, drunk and incapable, upon being told to go, he is reported to have spewed forth such dreadful things as "God dam me, thou needst not fear, The Divel confound me, thou art in heaven, By God's Bloud and Wounds, thou'rt sav'd, etc."[1] He held that God could not damn him, says Wood, and induced many to follow him.

---

[1] This reference of Wood's is the only one indicating that Coppe was ever a Muggletonian. Wood may have confused Coppe with L. Clarkson (Claxton), another arch-Ranter and a member of the group of Ranters called "My One Flesh" in which Coppe was a principal person.

[2] Cp. G.F. Nuttall, Richard Baxter (London: Thomas Nelson, 1965), p. 37: "Over the moral and theological vagaries to which Anabaptism led, Baxter was still more troubled: 'Familism . . . Libertinism, and Paganism . . . all spring from the root of Anabaptistry', he argued. The leader of the Ranters, for instance, Abiezer Coppe, now in Coventry Gaol 'for blasphemy and filthy lasivious practices' was a zealous Anabaptist (and) re-baptized more than any one man that ever I heard of in the Countrey. . . ."

[3] Laurence Clarkson (Claxton), a fellow arch-Ranter, admits to such erotic enterprise in his The Lost Sheep Found (London, 1660).

He was given house-room by Dr. John Pordage, the Behmenist, for a while in 1649, and shared in a "family communion, the members aspiring after the highest spiritual state through visible communion with angels." Pordage, says Anthony Wood, ". . . took part with the great blasphemer . . . and appeared in his behalf before when he was accriminated by, them of various foul matters."[2] For in 1650 Coppe was arraigned as the author of a scandalous and seditious book named *A Fiery Flying Roll*[3] and was shortly imprisoned. The book was ordered to be burned by Parliament on February 1, 1649-50.[4] In prison, Coppe was maintained by his brethren by generous gifts. These brethren were probably the members of a group of Ranters owning the apellation, "My One Flesh," with which A.C. (as Coppe usually termed himself) was closely associated.

From Newgate--encouraged by the threat of long imprisonment or exile--he issued a recantation judged spurious by some,[5] and there is little doubt that A.C. knew how to dissemble in the Familistic manner.

---

[1] Anon., *The Ranters Ranting* (London, 1650), unpaginated.

[2] Cp. DNB, "Pordage."

[3] *A Fiery Flying Roll . . . with another Flying Roll ensuing. . . .* Hereafter designated FFR. The second part is designated FFR2.

[4] Nat. Webb and Wm. Grantham, *The Ranters Reasons* (London, 1651), p. 10.

[5] Cp. the Reverend Mr. Drury's letter to Coppe appended to *Coppes Return* (1651), p. 16.

VIII4 Later on, at the Restoration, he changed his name and practiced physic as "Dr. Higham" at Barnes, Surrey. He died in 1672.

Coppe's raving and wildness are exhibited in his writings which provide some evidence, also, of the freedom in sexual matters of which he was accused. But this is not very pronounced. The document through which he acquired his great infamy was his *Fiery Flying Roll* but, for the study of Coppe, this little book is not the most important. Rather, it is a previous outpouring from his pen which is the more important, his delirious and alliterative *Some Sweet Sips of Some Spiritual Wine* found on the bookstalls in 1649.[1] It is the product of what he afterward remembered as four days in which he was ". . . utterly plagued, consumed, damned, rammed, and sunk into nothing into the bowels of the still Eternity."[2]

This booklet of sixty one pages argues for no doctrine but assumes a radical immanentalism or quasi-pantheism curiously mingled with Biblical ideas and all expressed in Biblical language. It is scarcely to be comprehended. It is the raving of a man drunk with new wine, the streaming soliloquy of a spirit-drenched soul. It is, as A.C. himself calls it, "one of the Songs of Sion." It is a babbling brook, a torrent from the high mountain, a river from the tabernacle of transfiguration:

---

[1] Hereafter designated SSW.

[2] FFR, "Preface."

VIII5

> For we are in that pure *River* of water of life, cleere as Christall, and that *River in us* . . . which is the *Fountaine* of life, the *Living God*, *the River*, the streames thereof make glad the City of God.
>
> We are (I say) in that *River*, and that *River* in us, when we are besides our selves, undone, nothing, and *Christ* all, in *all*, *in us*.
>
> The *River* is as cleare as Chrystall, nothing but Christ, all Christ, Chrystall--it is as clear as Chrystall, *Christ-all*. Hallelujah.[1]

The curious marriage of streams, quasi-pantheistic and Biblical, is accomplished so:

> The enmity within, and without shall be slaine--Then shall all channels runne into the Ocean, live in the *river*, return to the *Fountaine*, from whence they came: *recreating* themselves together there: Reade *Rom*. 8:19 to 24. The riddle, that riddle is read to me--Then shall the *shaddow* of *Separation* wholy flye away,--those that have been *wilde* and are *tame*, shall play together. The Wolfe shall play with the Lamb, the Lion shall eat straw like an Oxe, etc. A sucking *Childe* shall lead them, etc.[2]

Dashes and sprinkles of theological philosophy are everywhere. We may note, for example, how A.C. saw his experience in a Platonic way as "A call, to arise out of Flesh into Spirit, out of Form into Power, out of Type into Truth, out of Signes into the thing signified. . . ."[3] As for the Saints:

> Let them be joyned to the Lord, that they may be *one Spirit* . . . sweet fellowship! sweet Spirit! Divorce them from *Forme*, marry them to *power*. Divorce them from Type, marry them to *Truth* . . . Let them . . . *drink wine*, *new*, in the *Kingdom*. Even *new*, in the Kingdom. New in the Kingdom.[4]

---

[1] SSW, p. 54.

[2] SSW, p. 55.

[3] SSW, "Contents."

[4] SSW, p. 13.

VIII6 Oh! The new dispensation of the Spirit!

> But now, in these last dayes, he is speaking to his people more purely, gloriously, powerfully and immediately . . . variously, and strangely.[1]

Jeremiah in the thirty-first chapter is fulfilled! And now "the eternall God may be seene, felt, heard, and understood in the Book of the Creatures, as in the Book of the Scriptures. . . ."[2]

Divine revelations, written in man's inward parts, supersede human reason, hence:

> As for "Schollers," you shall go to Schole no longer . . . (but) entred into Christs Church . . . the Church of the first born . . . and then you will fall upon your books (as if ye were besides your selves) and bring your books together, and burne them before all men; so mightily will the word grow in you.[3]

So much, then, for learning! But then, what need had A.C. for learning? For he was exalted by visions which touched him at his heart. He saw,

> . . . all Kinde of Beasts of the field . . . and all Kinde of creeping wormes, and all Kinde of Fishes . . . all these beasts . . . and my selfe with them; yea, we had so free a correspondence together, as I oft-times would take the wildest of them, and put them in my bosome . . . especially such . . . I had exceedingly feared . . . the Snake, and Toade, &c. All had come forth of the river, the Living God. . . .[4]

---

[1] SSW, p. 25.

[2] SSW, p. 31.

[3] SSW, pp. 33-34.

[4] SSW, pp. 40-41, 55.

VIII7 With such a vision of bliss was A.C. blessed! All things were Fellow Creatures together, and peace was in all God's Holy Mountain. He had reached the Promised Land--he had seen and tasted of her Grapes:

> Drink off thy *Cup*, the *Cup* of *Salvation* . . . Drink oh friends; yea, drink abundantly oh beloved! it is lively wine, liquor of life, it will make the lame man leap like a Hart . . . for it is the *New Wine* in the *Kingdom*. . . .

Peace, peace in the Kingdom! "The enmity within, and without shall be slaine . . . First, Wolves and Lyons--within. . . ." Ecstatically A.C. pours out his oracle:

> The *Wormes in us* shall give over gnawing, the Tygers, Dragons, Lions *in us* (for my soule hath long dwelt among Lions) shall give over roaring, ramping, ravening, devouring . . . They shall not *hurt*, Doe they? *Serpents* stings shall be pulled out, are they not? We shall *beare* them in our Bosoms; Doe we not? And they shall not sting us; Doe they? *Lions in us* . . . but . . . Dead they are, and a honeycombe in their carkasse. . . .

Ah! the sweet honey in the Honeycombe! The Honeycombe of Free-Grace drips sweetly down: "What? a Honeycombe out of the carcasse of a wilde, dead, tamed Lion; Oh sweet--sweet God."[1]

The wild beasts that dwell within are rendered harmless, the serpent's sting is drawn, the guilty's prayer, enshrined by Keats,

> Save me from curious Conscience, that still lords
> Its strength for darkness
> Burrowing like a mole. . . .[2]

---

[1] SSW, p. 57.

[2] Keats, "Ode to Sleep."

this prayer is answered! The "Wormes in us give over their gnawing!" As for the beasts: "We exceedingly feared them--Bugbeares frighted us, when we were children, but . . . now they cannot. Halelujah . . . you can carry them in your bosome, and you saved harmlesse. . . ."[1]

Oh the glory of it! Words fail A.C. but they come tumbling forth from his pen--over and over, words upon words, heaped up like golden grain in Sion. He groans,

> I long to be utterly undone . . . that I, either am, or would be nothing, and feel the Lord of all, in all, in me, I am, or would be nothing. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and what I am in I am, that I am, So I am in the Spirit. . . .[2]

He gasps forth his paean:

> How sweet art thou, O Word, O God, to my taste! yea sweeter than the honey, and the honey combe, my God, sweet God! Awake Lute, awake Harpe, awake Deborah, awake, it is a song, a song; a song of loves; one of the Songs of Sion, the Lords song. . . .[3]

He who was lost is found, for "I am not in a strange land now, though in a strange posture, almost besides my self. . . ."

Ecstasy, irrational spirit, breaks through these words of Ab. Coppe's. Here is a true example of "divine madness!" Enraptured and unruly, Coppe pours out his amazement and his joy. Of the experience which was the genesis of this eruption he says little: we are confronted with the aftermath of one

---

[1] SSW, p. 57.

[2] SSW, p. 7.

[3] SSW, p. 48.

VIII9 who has encountered "a pure and naked God" and has learned to "live upon (him)."[1] Conventional religion with its "Signes, Vails, Glasses, Forms, Shaddowes . . ." is obsolete for him, he says, and for those who can learn to be like him.[2] But, aye, there's the rub, for who can learn to be like him? Who can gain such an experience by learning? Imitators may indeed learn to live madly, but where is the divinity in it?

One noticed in Jacob Bauthumley a marked inconsistency of ideas--an indetermination, at least of language, about the personality and impersonality of God; though, whatever the language, no evidence of a dynamic deity is to be seen there. In Coppe also, there is inconsistency, for his behavior is that of a prophet, a theistic, spirit-filled antinomian, while his doctrine is sometimes expressed in a quasi-pantheistic language which brings it into harmony with the song sung by the other Ranter leaders. He provides an interesting example of one unable to distinguish between infusion and latency of divine Spirit, so that his teaching does not altogether explain his conduct.[3] There is a great difference between Coppe and Bauthumley, here, for the latter was a theorist and a speculator, one whose inconsistencies arose

---

[1] SSW, p. 6.

[2] SSW, p. 7.

[3] On the difference between these two types of spirituality, see above, Chapter 2. Cf. Belfort Bax, The Rise and Fall of the Anabaptists (London: Swan Sonnenschein and Co., Ltd., 1903), p. 109ff.

VIII10 because he was unable to cope either emotionally or intellectually with his enterprise. But Coppe was gripped by an experience which rendered him incoherent: his is the incoherence of rapture, not of mental muddle.

Coppe is a prophetic antinomian, an antinomian of free-Spirit. To this antinomianism he gives pseudo-justification through a quasi-pantheistic rationale--probably borrowed. Actually, enthusiasm per se, whatever its manifestations, admits, in fact, of no logical justification, and needs none. It is beyond logic for it is a madness, albeit of a special sort. Later, when persecuted and imprisoned by a society unable to tolerate an anarchistic, mad prophet in its midst, Coppe was to write:

> I thought I was shewn a more excellent way, living and triumphing in joy unspeakable, and full of glory. . . . Unfathomable, unspeakable mysteries and glories being clearly revealed to me. . . . But at length the terrible and notable day of the Lord came upon me . . . and the cup of the Lord's right hand, was put into mine hand . . . full of intoxicating wine . . . whereupon being mad drunk, I so strangely spake, and acted I knew not what. . . . For I was (really, in very deed) besides myself. . . .

Like other arch-Ranters, he compares himself to the Spirit-stricken Nebuchadnezzar.[1]

"That Coppe's mind was disordered is clear" is a typical comment on this ranting prophet[2] and commentators on our period, such as Barclay, Wood, and Whiting, are inclined to dismiss phenomena such as that of Coppe and his followers as "fanaticism" or "religious madness." The latter term serves to reduce the phenomena to a malady fit for pathological study: the former dismisses them to a place outside the concern of rational men. To this madness, it seems, rational and civilized men would hesitate long to apply the adjective "divine." Such hesitation is comprehensible: Jerusalem would not be seen to be justifying her sister Sodom![1]

---

[1] Coppes Return to the Wayes of Truth (London, 1651), "Preface."

[2] DNB, "Coppe."

Coppe's followers, as other Ranters, were wont to call themselves "The Mad Crue" and to justify their madnesses from Scripture. Nat. Webbe and Wm. Grantham[2] vigorously attempt to undermine this appeal by carefully considering the types of madness found therein. Of the four kinds which they note, the leprous Ranters can claim to share in none![3] So observers, ancient and modern, have agreed among themselves to exile Dionysos and to abolish him, like Azazel, to the wilderness!

---

[1] The Ranters Reasons, p. 1.

[2] Joint authors of The Ranters Reasons.

[3] The four kinds are: supposed madness such as Jeremiah, Paul, and the Savior; counterfeit madmen such as King David when in deadly peril; those possessed of unclean spirits; and "spiritual phreneticks" such as the Prodigal Son, and the mis-guided St. Paul who was exceedingly mad against the Christians. Thos. Long in No Protestant but the Dissenters Plot (London, 1682), p. 177, writes, "It may be some will say (saith Mr. Baxter) he (Coppe) is mad; but it is otherwise: yet doubtless he is worse than mad in his delusions.

VIII12 But Dionysos is not so easily banished. Though no more welcome to seventeenth-century London than he was to the ancient Greek cities, he defiantly makes his entrance, and the prejudice of historians must yield to his power. The ranting outcries of horror and dread, "God ram me, dam' me," proclaim his presence in tavern and street. Even when religion has developed into a "higher and purer mode of expression," says Otto, the primitive reaction of shuddering before the Holy may break out again in all its naïveté.[1]

Coppe was "rotted, sunk, and damned" by his encounter with the "naked God" and is reduced at moments to mere gibbering. He exemplifies a more acute sense of the Holy than one can discern in the developed rationality of the ecclesia. It may be that the more frantic of the sects drew together those folk who possessed the wild, the primitive, the basic and creaturely sense of the Holy. Their behavior can be seen as a reaction to the ordering of religion, a protest against Hellenism which, in its stress on the "rationality" of the mystical, and on the suppression of the animal instincts, is in some sense a betrayal of true, essential religion by an over-civilizing of it.

Yet, the disciplining and ordering of religion is no sociological accident. Religious leaders have very often been aware that the Holy is not only Blessed but dangerous, and that he who would have dealings with this Supreme Occult Power must be screened from its disordering and desolating power by barriers and veils. This has been accomplished by imposing upon the adept's mind the conceptions of theology, and upon his conduct the edicts of a Law. And these, proving to be too weak, poetry and ritual dance, Apollonian in spirit, have been enlisted to give vent to what by its very nature must be irrepressible. Still, this has not always been enough. The persistent outbreaks of so-called Satanic worship, that is, the rebellion against the traditional "rational piety" of the Church and against the strict discipline imposed upon spiritual adventurers over the centuries, witnesses to a fairly widespread and urgent desire to penetrate into the Dark: the Mysterium Tremendum is yet Fascinans.

---

[1] R. Otto, The Idea of the Holy, Tr. J.W. Harvey (London: Oxford University Press, rev. ed., 1928), p. 16.

> Light am I: oh, that I were Night!
> But this is my loneliness
> That I am girt about with Light!
> But this is my loneliness
> That I am girt about with Light!
> Ah, that I were dark and of the Night!
> With what desire would I suck at the breasts of the Light!

How nobly, but with what mellow and strangely Apollonian tones does Nietzsche give voice to this dreadful longing![1]

In contrast to this, however, Coppe gives tongue, not in poetry but in cursing: not in the modulated tones of Apollo but in the wild cries of Dionysos. Language, albeit the language of poetry, will not do for him. He is "rotted, sunk, and damned," and exhales not in language but in an un-language. The Holy for him, it must be emphasized, was not a realm of Light but of Dark, and hence he must renounce all usual and common language to express his experience of creaturehood, of dust and ashes, of despair before the Dark Fire of the Holy.[1] He must perforce curse and not bless. And, on reflection, he perceived that cursing was the language of Angels, for did it not stand written in the Scripture that the Angel of the Judgment lifted up his right hand to heaven, and swore by Him who liveth for ever and ever? So he writes, "Its meat and drink to an Angel (who knows no evill, no sin) to sweare a full-mouthed oath. . . ."[2] Coppe's cursing was, to him, a holy incantation. It was his own vail and catharsis also by which alone he could survive in the presence of the Most Holy.

---

[1] Also Sprach Zarathustra, "Das Nachtlied:" My translation.

"That Coppe's mind was disordered is clear," said a critic, and at this point it must be admitted that the critic was right. It is far from clear, however, that that critic understood the nature of Coppe's madness. Having sipped a little at Coppe's spiritual wine, we ourselves are in a better position to understand that Coppe was indeed mad, but that his was a divine madness. This is not to say that there was

---

[1] "The daemonic-divine object may appear to the mind an object of horror and dread." R. Otto, op. cit., p. 31.

[2] FFR2, p. 12, cf. p. 8. He quotes Rev. 10:6.

VIII15 anything noble or beautiful about this madness. Madness is not edifying whether it be divine or not. A.C., in his loathsome gibberings and in his sometime repellent behavior, gave just cause for horror and shock. Of this, it seems, he was aware. He compares himself not only to the Spirit-stricken Nebuchadnezzar but also to the daemon-possessed David writhing naked before the Holy Ark. But himself understanding what it was to be possessed by the Awful and Holy Power, and knowing how such experience pre-empts the ordinary claims, values, and judgments of normal human society, he scoffs at his judges and detractors, labelling them "mincing Michal."

This Holy Power, this daemon, working its ferment within, intoxicating the mind, hallucinating the imagination, seized upon the manifold and unarranged contents of Coppe's mind, the higher with the lower, the beautiful with the ugly, the faith with the fear, the innocence with the guilt, and turned them into turbulence and turmoil.

Was this Spirit, then, divine? Can we indeed speak of "divine madness" when it manifests confusion and destruction? Many would hesitate to do so fearing the justification of Sodom by Jerusalem to be not only unedifying but pessimistic! It is painful to admit the reality of the Dark Side of God. St. Paul, with heroic faith, declared the divine Spirit to be that of joy and peace, not of confusion . . .! But it would be naïve and disingenuous to maintain this as a constant truth. From the glossolalia and immoral antinomianism of the

VIII16 Corinthian church to the monstrous immoderacy of Münster, from the frenzy and raving of the early Quakers to the perversity of the Psychedelic church--we see conformity, and reason, and moderation overthrown. Examples could be endlessly multiplied. Such phenomena are the manifestations of genuine religious experience. To rational and ordered society in general, it is a fact that enthusiasm, both secular and sacred, is "a horrid thing, a very horrid thing!" It does not appear that, however desirable, moral refinement is a necessary manifestation of the Holy!

It might be further remarked that the dark side of Spirit is to be seen not only in a more rational guise, as, for example, in the iniquitous Inquisition, but also in the almost incredible blood-lust of the witch hunt which, over centuries, has displayed the enthusiastic Dionysiac insanity which may overtake a whole society. Disowned today, the perpetrators of these crimes against humanity manifested the Spirit of their religion, the Dark Genius of their enlightenment. This phenomenon is a particularly good example of that truthful adage that "whom the gods would destroy they first make mad."

Dark Spirit--Dionysos--disarrays, confuses, overthrows, and destroys the frail institutions of human reason and morality. Its claims are at once prior and more primitive than they. Taking human spirit unawares, Dionysos overwhelms it, carrying it where it would not. Helpless, the human subject

VIII17 is "rotted, sunk, and damned"--confounded in its creatureliness.

That Coppe's experience was desolating is plain. When the storm was past, dizzy from his vertiginous glance into the Abyss, he trembled still. The nothingness of the Creature was horribly exposed to him, and so he writes, "What I am, that I am, in I am. . . ."

The glory of the transcendent God was such that it confounded all other things--all base things! And all other things Coppe knew to be base. He himself experienced what Isaiah the prophet found, namely, that he was a man of unclean lips. His own "holiness" was "plaguy," to use his own word. It is his Fiery Flying Roll, written very shortly after his traumatic seizure by his daemon, that contains his reflections upon that experience.

He saw himself reduced to the stature of a little child, and he tells his readers that they, too, must be so reduced--to a state of innocency where there is no knowledge either of good or evil. "To such a little child, undressing is as good as dressing, foul clothes as good as fair cloathes . . . he knows no evil &c. . . ." Such an one must "first lose all his righteousnesse, every bit of his holinesse, and every crum of his Religion, and be plagued, and confounded (by base things) into nothing. By base things which God and I hath chosen."

Coppe produces his dialectic:

VIII18

> And yet I shew you a more excellent way, when you have past this. . . . In a word, my plaguy, filthy, nasty holinesse hath been confounded by base things. And then . . . by base things so-called have been confounded also; and thereby have I been confounded into eternall Majesty, unspeakable glory, my life my self.[1]

He enlarges upon this cryptic situation:

> And by, and through these Base things (as upon the wings of the wind) have I been carried up into the arms of my love, which is invisible glory, eternall Majesty, purity itself, unspotted beauty, even that beauty which makes all other beauty but meer ugliness, when set against it. . . .[2]

Hence, A.C. is at once crushed and delivered, destroyed and renewed, as he feels.

Rudolf Otto comments on such a situation as follows: "The daemonic-divine object may appear to the mind an object of horror and dread" and also something "that allures with a potent charm," so that the creature wants somehow, to possess it. "He feels something that captivates and transports him with a strange ravishment, rising often enough to the pitch of dizzy intoxication; it is the Dionysiac element in the Numen." This experience, comments Otto further on, leads to a craving for possession of this divinity. In spite of the rationalizing process in religion, perhaps "fostered unduly," this craving "may grow to be the sole, one-sided, exclusive interest, a cry that drowns all other notes. . . ."[3] So Coppe,

---

[1] FFR2, p. 12.

[2] FFR2, p. 14.

[3] R. Otto, op. cit., pp. 31 and 57; cf. p. 113.

VIII19 in whom perhaps the wish is father of the thought, proclaims "My most excellent Majestie in me," and gains a new name, "I AM."[1]

Coppe's experience of the quintessence of existence led him to realize the utter dependence of all things on divine Being, and thus to an extreme immanentalism. The divine within is Real and "All things that ever were, are, or shall be visible--are the Grace wherein the King of Glory (the eternall, invisible Almightinesse, hath lain as it were) dead and buried."[2] Hence, he is not truly a pantheist even though he uses such quasi-pantheistical language as the following: "I clearly saw distinction, diversity, variety, and as clearly saw all swallowed up into unity. And it hath been my song many times since, within and without, unity universality, unity, Eternall Majesty, &c."[3]

This is, after all, closely paralleled by the language of Colossians, in which also the restoration of the unity of God and Creation is linked to the overcoming of the power of sin.[4] So Coppe concludes the passage just quoted with the words: "But behold, behold, he is now risen with a witnesse, to save Zion with vengeance, or to confound and plague all

---

[1] FFR, "Preface," cf. SSW, p. 7.

[2] FFR, "Preface."

[3] Ibid.

[4] Paul, Epist. to the Colossians, Ch. 2.

VIII20 things into himself . . . Sin and Transgression is finished and ended. . . ."

A work published two years after the Fiery Flying Roll was called Coppe's Return to the Wayes of Truth, &c. &c. And the Wings of the Fiery flying Roll clipt, &c.[1] This pitiful cry from within the mouldy and crumbling walls of a dank London prison is a denial both of teachings for which Coppe was indeed responsible, and of those of which he declared himself innocent. The errors denied are summed up in the "Contents" of the work as follows:

i) That there is no sin.
ii) That there is no God.
iii) That Man, or the meer creature, is very God.
iv) That God is in man, or in the Creature, and nowhere else.
v) That cursing and swearing is no sin.
vi) That adultery and fornication is no sin.
vii) That the Community of wives is lawful.

Actually, the evidence surviving convicts him of errors i, iii, v, vi, but not of errors ii and iv. For Coppe, God was not dead, neither was He imprisoned and expressed in the material creation.

All these teachings were held somewhere among the Ranters in general, and perhaps in particular in that assembling of Ranters known as the "My One Flesh" with which A.C. was closely

---

[1] London, 1651.

VIII21 associated. This association makes it somewhat probable that he was guilty--at least at some point--of error vii, the Community of wives. We must give some consideration to this group as we continue to explore their own ranting Prophet.

The principal evidence linking A.C. to this group of Ranters is contained in Laurence Clarkson's The Lost Sheep Found.[1] Clarkson, who was a well-known Ranter leader, though perhaps not as famous as A.C., came in the course of his wanderings to join up with the "One Flesh" and to add his somewhat baleful influence to an already confused situation. Under interrogation Claxton (for he was known by both forms of that name) said that he knew Coppe and that was all for he had not seen him above two or three times.[2] Claxton's account of his life is remarkably frank--perhaps to the point of exhibitionism--and there is good reason to accept what he says. Thus it seems that the "One Flesh" was a closely knit group possibly consisting of several companies, but at least two, for Claxton says that, "Copp was by himself with a company ranting and swearing, which I was seldom addicted to. . . ."[3]

Though so widely known and so Spirit-stricken, it cannot be established that Abiezer Coppe was either the founder or

---

[1] London, 1660. We shall deal with L. Clarkson and his book in the following chapter. The particular references are pp. 25, 26, and 31.

[2] The Lost Sheep Found, p. 31.

[3] Ibid., p. 26.

VIII22 the principal leader of the "One Flesh," though the latter seems likely.[1] It cannot even be shewn that his own doctrines were shared by more than some of them, though they may all have been one in their confusions. We can be sure only that they consorted together. It may be that, like Claxton, Coppe simply heard of the group and drifted in with them. From the fragmentary evidence available one gains the impression of the existence of a drifting mass of uprooted, lost, and confused people, flotsam in the troubled waters of political and religious chaos. From time to time leaders of different sorts drift in--Muggleton, Winstanley, Robins, Fox--and clusters of adherents form. Who can say what are the reagents of the clustering in any particular case? Who can analyze with any certainty the factors--personal and charismatic, emotional, sociological--at work? Perhaps the element or elements of emotion and belief in common were ever of the most general kind. And in groups that were by nature non-conformist where traditional social norms were concerned, it is not to be expected that rigid codes and creeds would be much in evidence. Hence the connexion between leader and led might be of the flimsiest kind, and perhaps consisting of a common type of disbelief only.

---

[1] R. Baxter, Plain Scripture Proof, p. 147, writes, "Called by some the Ranters, and by others, the High Attainers." This latter term, according to Sippell, was first used of Familists; Cp. Werdendes Quäkertum, p. 95. Cf. L. Clarkson, The Lost Sheep Found, pp. 24-25.

VIII23 Reliable information, other than that given by Claxton, about "My One Flesh" is hard to obtain. Still, it may be generally assumed from fragmentary evidence that they were a roisterous and wanton folk, bunching together in groups drawn widely from Anabaptist and Familistic circles corresponding with Coppe's area of influence. They tended to a spiritualistic communism, having all things in common and regarding the earth as a common treasury.[1] The Dionysiac principles of Wine and Desire were strongly in evidence. The men possessed the women in common, and they looked to alcohol for inspiration for "Where there is no Wine, There's nothing divine," said a popular song.[2] Of course, the Fellow Creature alcohol both dissolved inhibitions, and it seems, encouraged feelings of companionship, of "Fellow Creatureliness." Coppe's disciples knew of their "union in God,"

---

[1] Some Ranter ideas looked a little like those of the Levellers, and Winstanley felt forced to defend the Diggers which he did in a pamphlet called A Vindication of those . . . called Diggers or Some Reasons given by them against . . . Ranting. . . . (London, 1649). Ranters, he says, waste the Treasures of the Earth. They are idlers and cheaters, and, "for want of food and rayment, through an inward proud sullennesse, either sterves their own bodies, or else through an inward rage endeavours the ruine of others."

[2] Anon., The Ranting Whore's Resolution--a ballad (1662). Ranters were ideal subjects for Restoration comedy and they had a deserved place in popular memory. This song is truly Dionysiac in tone!

I laugh when they tell/Mee stories of Hell
I think there is no such Cavern./If Heaven there be
(As some will tell mee)/I am sure it must bee in the Tavern,
Where there is no Wine/There's nothing divine;
Wee'l think of a grave at more leisure,/Boy fill th' other glass
For I am a Lass/That will be a Lady of pleasure.

VIII24 of "their being one in God, and God one in them,"[1] a doctrine shared by the followers of L. Claxton. When a man lay with a woman, he lay "with all Creation."[2] The thought behind this, suggested also in Bauthumley, may owe something to Boehme's teaching on the common Source of the soul: "When the branches have realized that they all belong to one tree, they will no longer imagine that they are trees themselves, but rejoice in their common root."[3] So Coppe affirms the familiar Familistic theme: "That we are partakers of the Divine nature through our Mystical and Spiritual Filiation . . ." as a son partakes of his father's nature.[4] The Spirit of the Vine helps a man to realize this--to know it in experience! As one Spirit, so one Flesh, one with all Creation. These illuminates exulted in their knowledge and in the freedom it gave them from the laws of ordinary unilluminated men.

Since all is one, all things even "base things have been a fiery Chariot to mount (me) up into divine glory," writes Coppe.[5] With a vast enthusiasm, Coppe writes, "And barren, demure Mical thinks . . . that I chose base things when I

---

[1] SSW, p. 6.

[2] *Lost Sheep Found*, p. 30.

[3] J. Boehme, *Mysterium Magnum*, xxx, 52.

[4] *Copps Return* (London, 1651), p. 24.

[5] FFR2, p. 10. In the original this page is wrongly numbered 8.

VIII25 sate down, and eat and drank around on the ground with Gypseys, and clipt hug'd and kiss'd them, putting my hand into their bosomes. . . ." He scoffs at respectable Mical:

> O base! saith mincing Mical, the least spark of modesty would be as red as crimson or scarlet, to hear this. . . . But . . . (once) I abhorred the thought of Ladies . . . yet I can if it be my will, kisse and hug Ladies, and love my neighbour's wife as my selfe, without sin.[1]

These latter-day Elijahs ". . . were very high in Imagination, like Capernaum, exalted in their knowledge up to Heaven. . . ."[2] Here they were far above the petty conventions of normal human society. Their "freedom" was a freedom outside the bounds of normal social intercourse. But when accused and gaoled by an outraged civic body for the exercise of this freedom, their brother Coppe proclaimed--though not without an evident ambiguity--that, "I own none but the 'glorious liberty of the sons of God' which I and the whole creation groans after."[3]

"My One Flesh" was a movement deliberately directed towards a "dropping out," a renunciation of ordinary society. It is natural, therefore, that this abandonment should find expression in vehement attacks upon the established social order, and Coppe's Fiery Flying Roll is indeed fiery, an

---

[1] FFR2, pp. 10-11.

[2] L. Muggleton, Acts of the Witnesses (London, 1699), p. 52.

[3] A. Coppe, A Remonstrance (London, 1651), p. 5. This was a reaction to the Act of 10 August, 1650. Thomason's endorsement of this pamphlet as appearing on 3 January, 1650 must be a mistake.

VIII26 anarchistic tract denouncing all Establishment, civil and ecclesiastical. It is thoroughly nihilistic. Twice-born Coppe, resurrected from the grave of Form, pours out his Jeremiad:

> All things that ever were . . . are the Grave wherein the King of Glory . . . hath lain dead and buried. But behold, he is now risen with a witnesse, to save Zion with vengeance, or to confound and plague all things into himself. . . .[1]

In Coppe's mind, the order of society and the guilt which burrowed and festered in his mind--for he was man of unclean lips and dwelt in the midst of a people of unclean lips--were inseparable. To be free from the latter, the former must be overturned.

> Be no longer so horridly, hellishly, impudently, arrogantly, wicked, as to judge what is sinne, what not, what evill, and what not. For thou, and all thy ignorant Divines, so called . . . are ignorant of this one thing. That sinne and transgression is finisht, it is a mere tiddle. . . .[2]

So, he makes the Lord say:

> I inform you that I overturn, overturn, overturn. And as the Bishops, Charles, and the Lords, have had their turn, overturn, so your turn shall be next . . . that oppose me, the Eternall God, who am UNIVERSALL Love, and whose service is perfect freedome, and pure Libertinisme.[3]

This enthusiastic antinomian, this Prophet of the "One Flesh,"

---

[1] FFR, "Preface."

[2] FFR, p. 7. The "Divines" are the Puritans.

[3] FFR, p. 1.

VIII27 went staring, waving, and shouting through the streets of London and Southwark. He says that he charged

> so many Coaches, so many hundreds of men and women of the greater rank in the open streets, with my hand stretched out, my hat cock'd up, staring on them as if I would look through them, gnashing with my teeth at some of them, and day and night with a huge loud voice proclaiming the day of the Lord throughout London and Southwark.... .[1]

Whether the fashionable Londoners were alarmed or affronted, amused or bemused, A.C. does not say!

In fact, it does not seem that Coppe, or any Ranter of the several kinds, believed in the Day of the Lord as a present or future cataclysmic occurrence. They shared the Familistic (and pantheistic) view that numbly looked to the future without hope. But Coppe himself was very confused about his beliefs. Agitated and excited, he loved to indulge in prophetic signs, kissing beggars and cripples, and falling down at their feet, emptying his pockets of money as he denounced the rich and their "cankered gold." He made a point of associating with Gypsies who, like the Samaritans of old, were strangers, foreigners, and outcastes. He was preoccupied with his "OWN FLESH": "Hide not thyself from thine own flesh. . . ."

There are touching elements in Coppe's frenzied outcries. His feeling for the poor and oppressed rings true. A genuine anguish is to be felt in what he writes. At times the reader

---

[1] FFR2, Ch. V.

VIII28 feels that he might have genuinely declared with the prophet that, "The zeal of thine house hath even consumed me."

Naturally, since there is no direct evidence, one cannot speak with any certainty of the types of people who were drawn to "My One Flesh." One may suppose that some were drawn simply by the licentious freedom made possible by Coppe's doctrines, or by doctrines found in the group which were not attributable to Coppe, and that others, socially and politically disaffected, found in the movement a way of protest. It is also possible, however, that some were participants in an experience having something in common with their leader, Coppe. It is possible, for example, that some really did feel a union with all creation.

Some such feeling, not necessarily connected with pantheism, is of widespread occurrence. It is to be seen, for example, in the Corpus Paulinem where the sense of the inner unity of man and creation is expressed in terms of a common soteriology--a doctrine which, in our major Western religious tradition, goes back at least as far as the eighth century B.C., to the prophet Isaiah.[1] This feeling is to be seen, further, among the Adamites whose nakedness was related more to Eden than to the prophetic signs of either Isaiah or the early Quakers. It may be that Coppe's nakedness in the pulpit was such. The cult of nudism in general is a sign of

---

[1] Cp. Isaiah 11; Romans 8; Ephes. 1.

VIII29 this naturalistic consciousness. In a less earthy form this sense of union with Nature appears in the nature mysticism of poets like Traherne, and later on, in Wordsworth. Still more latterly, it is to be seen among those who use mind-expanding drugs, and live in communities au naturel!

Such a consciousness or feeling need not spring from some enveloping experience of immanent divinity or from anything so rare and exotic. On the contrary, the feeling for unity with nature is a fairly common experience though perhaps more common in youth than age. And where a simple form of pantheistic doctrine is readily available--one which not only fits the feeling but feeds upon some prevailing scepticism concerning current orthodoxies--the appearance of a cultus should occasion no surprise. The popularity of pantheism over the centuries must owe something to a readily and commonly available source rather than to profound, and thus rare, religious experience. It seems, on the face of things, rather unlikely that the doctrine has been so widely held merely as a popular speculation.

In the case of some of those who became Ranters, pantheism may have been adopted the more readily--as we have before suggested--in reaction to the dread born of the guilt-producing emphases of Calvinism.[1] We have noticed the element of guilt in Coppe's writings, and in his case, he had his own dreadful encounter with the Holy which supplemented the Calvinistic preaching of Holy Wrath. The inconsistencies in Coppe's writing, his inspired incoherence, show him unable to commit himself with his entire being either to a doctrine of theism or to one of pantheism. This points to a struggle within, and perhaps he was not alone in this.

---

[1] This element is dominant in the case of the arch-Ranter L. Clarkson who, as we shall note in the next chapter, came to join himself to the "One Flesh."

What may we hazard to be the main generating principle of the "My One Flesh?" As we saw in Chapter IV, it is easy to understand that if the pain of guilt and fear be associated with the strictures and threats of a stringent religious system, a reaction involving the rejection of the whole system may well come about; though this may perhaps not be accomplished without some further guilty pangs. In the light of what we know about the "My One Flesh" and of ranting antinomianism in general (and we really do not know very much), we might come to see that, after the rejection of a guilt and pain-producing religious consciousness and system, relief might be sought in a simple religious condition, one that "got back to Nature," to a cultus of warm brotherhood within a "free" community. It would be natural to seek to overthrow "artificial religion" and "artificial society."[1] The not

---

[1] This theme is developed by N. Cohn in his The Pursuit of the Millennium (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1961), p. 195ff., with reference to the Brethren of the Free Spirit. It need hardly be added here that the popularity of Stoic ideas, mentioned in the last chapter, could well have had an influence here.

VIII31 uncommon sense of "union with Nature" would serve this syndrome rather well.

Concerning Ranter experience of "the Holy" one might speculate that, in general, this was experience only of Holy Wrath. It is unlikely that experiences like Coppe's were very common, and certainly not in like degree. Common raving enthusiasm is likely to be but the product of hysteria when it is not generated by such an experience. That is to say, unconsciously or semi-consciously, it is likely to stem from imitative excitement. Thomas Underhill, in his *Hell Broke Loose*, published in 1660, says of Ranters that they ". . . danced and roared . . . and went into frenzies, and lay with their bodies swollen, acted strangely, and fell into raptures and blasphemings." There is no reason to doubt his statement.

Even terror of "Holy Wrath" alone, however, is sufficient to generate a real sense of creatureliness and worthlessness. If Coppe wished to communicate his own feeling of this, he cannot have found the task hard. His interpretation of his experience was, as we have seen, that to recognize and to accept the nothingness of the Creature was essential to the crowning glory of deification. (But the actual significance of that term in this context is extremely obscure). There was nothing new in this. It was the stock-in-trade of "mystical religion."[1] Becoming fully a "Creature" on par with the beasts

---

[1] R. Barclay, *The Inner Life of the Religious Societies of the Commonwealth* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1876), p. 415, in summarizing the doctrine of the Brethren of the Free Spirit states it so: "We need to forsake and annihilate ourselves,

VIII32 of the field is, in a sense, a self-annihilation. We noticed this Ranter tendency in Bauthumley. This renunciation of full human status is expressed in the foisting on to the indwelling deity all responsibility for human action. It is further expressed in the retreat from the order of society, for which we have already used the modern term "dropping out."[1] Ranters, if Winstanley and others are to be believed, became parasites on the community. Winstanley has been already quoted but we may here refer to M. Stubs, the recanting Ranter, who says that Ranters, when in need, felt that they could borrow money with no obligation to repay, and "not only make use of a Man's Wife, but of his Estate, Goods, and Chattels also. . . ."[2]

This reduction of man, and this retreat from full human status, is matched perhaps inevitably, by a reduction of God from Lord and Judge to a mere Power underlying Nature.[3] Again, we saw the same process at work in Bauthumley's writings. His radical iconoclasm, apparently expressing this Ranter movement toward pantheism, brought about the death of God.

Emotional compensation for this evaporation of a Father God whose love had been lost was found in a community love,

---

and thus to realize the fact that God by his Spirit, dwells in every creature, and works all things. We thus become one with God. He who has realized this Union is not constrained by anything outward, for God determines his acts, and directs his thoughts."

[1] Cf. Appendix to this work.

[2] Cp. The Ranters Recantation (1650), unpaginated.

[3] A dictum of Goethe was, "Wie ein Mann ist, so ist sein Gott."

of some sort. "Love" was shared corporately and indiscriminately. We may note Ed. Stokes' remarks in his comment on To. Salmon's cursing letter,[1] ". . . yet they love each other intirely. . . ." This "love" was recognized even in the caricatures of Ranters in contemporary literature as, for example, in the drinking-song which opens the first chapter of this work. But the caricature in this song is a telling one. In a penetrating insight it reveals the truth that this corporate "love," like the rest of Ranter behavior, was sheer subjectivism and escapism, demanding no moral fibre, no commitment, and no responsibility.

> Yet whils't I speak of loving one,
> Let no mistaking come.
> For we that know our liberty,
> In loving all love none.
>
> Then let us rant it to the sill
> And let our love too range,
> For it hath wings and they are free'st
> That in their loves do change.

The whole Ranter syndrome has the complexion of nihilism.

How serious Ranters were in general about their pantheism is hard to judge. Perhaps they were *very* serious about it in its role of serving their fears and attitudes of quite independent origin. Yet some, even in the "One Flesh," may well have been sensitive to a divine Immanence, like Salmonists, and then, carried further down the stream of radical, immanental religion, have embraced a pantheism which finally shrank into a materialism. Within this framework, the claim to be

---

[1] Cp. Chapter I.

VIII34 "very God," as we have formerly noted, does not amount to very much! Edward Hyde wrote, "If God be all things, then is he sin and wickednesse; and if he be all things, then he is this Dog, this Tobacco-pipe, he is me, and I am him, as I have heard some say. . . ."[1]

It is plain that such a passive spiritual condition could not survive the intervention of a daemon. The gap between pantheists of this type and a man like Coppe was great and deep, but yet there was a bridge by which they could come together. This was their common antinomianism. On the one hand, there was the freedom of "My One Flesh" by which a man could "lye with all Creation"--a phrase which sounds uncommonly like an Adamitic slogan--and, on the other, there was the freedom of Coppe who had found that the sweetness of spiritual wine and of the Honeycombe was all one, and that base things made a way by which to mount up into glory.

Enthusiast and pantheist were one in being both beyond and above any law.

Summary and Conclusion

In A.C. we see a classic example of a religious phenomenon--a man stricken by the Spirit and pulverized by the Power of the Holy. Dionysiac in experience, he could cry with the Psalmist that, "Thou hast taken me up and cast me down."

---

[1] Ed. Hyde, A Wonder and yet no Wonder, a great Red Dragon in Heaven (London, 1651), p. 24.

VIII35 In this rapture, reason is displaced and discarded. All ordinary logic is dismissed, and the usual scale of values reversed: light is dark, sin is virtue, cursing is blessing. The power of Dionysos is manifested in the Ranters--here, in the "My One Flesh" group--under the symbols of Wine and Desire. Eroticism is a prominent element in the Ranter disposition.

Coppe, in his writings, attaches himself to a pantheistic rationale, but enthusiasm requires no justification, and it appears that he merely attaches himself to a popular religious fashion of speech. The only common ground between Coppe and those among his followers who were pantheists was moral antinomianism justified from their own special points of view.

In the "My One Flesh" group we see epitomized a group of social "drop-outs," persons finding self-annihilation through social suicide. The element of guilt seeping through Abiezer Coppe's words--an element which we shall mention more particularly in the next chapter as the primary characteristic of a member of this group, the arch-Ranter Laurence Clarkson (Claxton)--gives some indication of the morbid state of mind and the depressed state of morale among these people which led them to nihilism.

We do not know how many of Coppe's followers were intimidated or crushed as he was by an experience of the Holy as a Dark Power, but in view of the common preaching of Judgment and Doom we cannot dismiss the possibility that this was a fairly common state among Ranters.

Clarkson

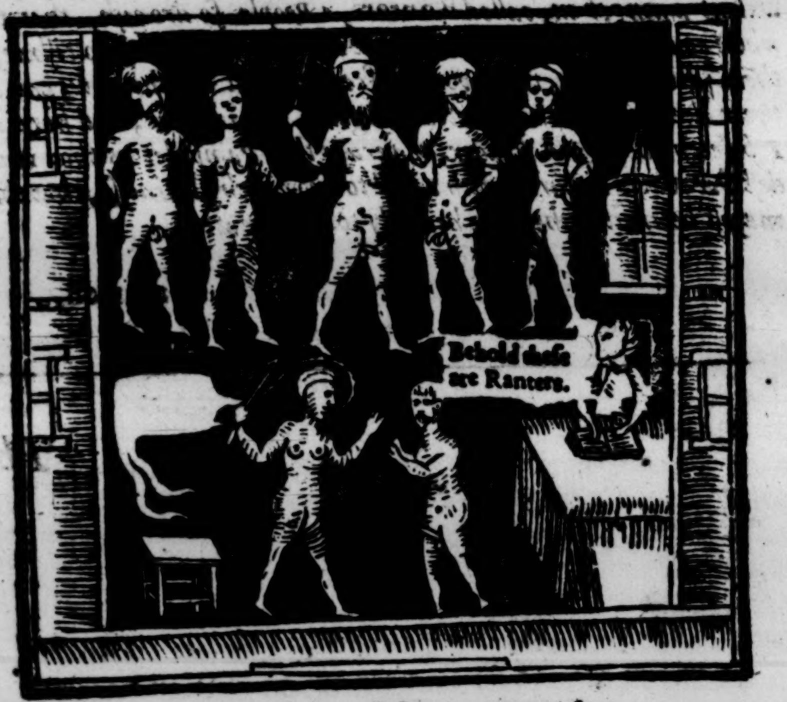
The Ranters Religion. 8

OR,

A faithfull and infallible Narrative of their damnable and diabolical opinions, with their deteſtable lives & actions.

With a true diſcovery of ſome of their late prodigious pranks, and unparalleld deportments; with a paper of moſt blaſphemous Verſes found in one of their pockets, againſt the Majeſty of Almighty God, and the moſt ſacred Scriptures, rendred *verbatim*.

Publiſhed by Authority.


Behold theſe are Ranters.

Oct: 11

London, Printed for *R. H.* 1650.

CHAPTER IX

LAURENCE CLARKSON

IX1

> Behold, I was born in iniquity, and in sin hath my mother conceived me.

L.C. (as Laurence Clarkson, otherwise Claxton, usually termed himself) sprang into the public eye with the publication in 1650 of his shocking pamphlet, A Single Eye, all Light and no Darkness; or Light and Darkness One.[1] The book seems quickly to have fallen into official hands because, although Parliament commanded the incineration of this "impious and Blasphemous Book" on September 27th, it did not appear on the

---

[1] Hereafter referred to as S.E. In London, 1646, Randall the Familist published a translation of Nichola of Cusa's De Visione Dei under the title of The Single Eye. Clarkson's brief work is like that of Cusanus only in name and it seems likely that he was attracted by, and borrowed, this arresting title. The obvious reference here is to Matthew 6:22, "If thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light," but it is conceivable that L.C. was attracted by Cusanus' doctrine that Truth is single and simple, lies beyond the principle of Contradiction--a law of the human reason--and is unattainable. God can be known, however, but only by intuition. Possibly the Ranter "High Attainers" found this Truth accessible to them! Rufus Jones thought that this translation of Cusanus was done by John Everard; Cp. Spiritual Reformers in the 16th and 17th Centuries (London: Macmillan, 1914), p. 256. Publication by Randall the Familist is significant for it almost certainly means that this work was in circulation in the nether-world of "inward religion," and provides a good indication of the type of work which was attractive in those realms.

IX2 bookstalls until October 4th. But, of course, the delay may have been occasioned by the book's condemned status. Though, in that case, delay seems to have been all that the Act accomplished. In general--as indeed we have remarked before--legislation was openly defied by Ranter authors and their readers alike.[1] Doubtless, the Act proved to be good advertising and supplemented the effect already obtained by popular anti-Ranter pamphlets.

The book was bound to prove popular reading. It maintained as a principal point that God was not concerned with moral judgments since all things were one to him, and this for the very good reason that God was himself the dynamic in every act. Subsidiary theses are also argued, one of which is that different moral judgments would divide God and make him many, and therefore finite. Another is that, to the pure all things are pure so that no one can be guilty of sin unless that act be sinful to him. Clarkson roundly finishes his initial barrage at the fortress of morality with the following salvo:

> So that I weigh not how I am judged, in that I judge not my self. So to conclude, the censures of Scripture, Churches, Saints, Devils, are no more to me than the cuting off of a gods neck. Vale.[2]

Vale indeed!

---

[1] But not by them alone by any means! Cp. Wm. Haller, The Rise of Puritanism (New York: Columbia University Press, 1938), passim.

[2] S.E., "Preface."

IX3 As if this were not sufficient to set the world howling about his ears, in the course of the sixteen pages which form the body of the pamphlet, Clarkson maintains the opinion (found by his fellow-citizens both disgusting and fascinating) that no one can be truly free from the consciousness, and thus taint, of sin until he has committed the act in the conviction that it is not sinful. This notion seems to have sent thrills of delighted horror down the spines of his readers! He recalls elsewhere that an urgent call to perfection was in his mind and that this meant that it was necessary to commit every sin--so-called--in order to be set free from it. Except for murder, this he claims to have done![1]

---

[1] Cp. L. Clarkson, The Lost Sheep Found (London, 1660), p. 25, hereafter referred to as L.S.F. Clarkson's doctrine bears an interesting resemblance to that of Tantric Hinduism and Buddhism of the Left Hand. "It was believed that once the adept had reached a certain degree of spiritual attainment the normal rules of behavior were no longer valid for him, and that their deliberate breach, if committed in an odor of sanctity, would actually help him on the upward path. . . ." Spiritual exaltation above Law is thus one element in Tantricism as in Ranterism. In addition, the following extract from the Cittaviśuddhiprakavaṇa gives a teaching similar to that of Boehme, i.e., the illusory nature of "sin," and leads to consequences similar to those drawn by "ranting Behmenists."

a) As a clear crystal assumes
The color of another object,
So the jewel of the mind is colored
With the hue of what it imagines.

b) The jewel of the mind is naturally devoid
Of the color of these ideas,
Originally pure, unoriginated,
Impersonal, and immaculate.

IX4 We must now look at the involutions of Clarkson's notions--notions which were expressed by some of the Ranters in a very active form. This we will begin to do by making a speedy survey of The Single Eye.

It is the main concern of The Single Eye to remove from its reader's mind, and from Clarkson's own it seems, any ground for guilt. He, Clarkson, wishes to demonstrate the unreality of evil and the illusory nature of sin. Distortions of Behmenistic themes are central, as they are in Bauthumley.

Though seemingly wholly irreligious in aim, the pamphlet is couched in highly religious language. One feels bound to ask oneself whether L.C. be a charlatan? It is a question which we will reserve until the end. For the moment we shall be content to summarize his teachings and preoccupations.

Light and Darkness, cosmic principles, form a dominant theme. Whilst such a note is far from being exclusively Behmenistic, one cannot help but suspect that this is this theme's proximate source. Scripture is adduced to show that God's saving work lies in transforming--not removing--Darkness.

---

c) So, with all one's might, one should do
Whatever fools condemn,
And, since one's mind is pure,
Dwell in union with one's divinity.

d) The mystics, of pure mind,
Dally with lovely girls,
Infatuated with the poisonous flames of passion,
That they may be set free from desire.

These quotations are to be found in Sources of Indian Tradition, ed. Wm. T. De Bary (New York: Columbia University Press, 1964), vol. i, pp. 190 and 195.

IX5 Isaiah 42:16 serves: "I will make darkness light before them." This transformation will occur in the mind of the Creature where Darkness has its dwelling: ". . . yea, it is intended that you call the darknesse in the Creature, which darknesse is sin, hell, and misery: this darknesse he will make Light, Heaven, and Felicity. . . ."[1] He might have added with the Psalmist for it is in tune with his theme, "For the Darkness is no Darkness with Thee: the Darkness and Light to Thee are both alike."

He affirms, as Bauthumley also insists, that sin exists only in a darkened--that is, spiritually unilluminated--imagination. How can sin really exist, he asks? All acts are actually "in God." All powers are of God, and therefore all is divine, and all is good. Cleverly he adds the comment that by accounting something sinful, one abuses God by making him the author of it!

Since one knows that the notion of sin is illusory, one must purge one's mind of such thoughts (which in fact slander God) by actively committing all such acts as are commonly adduced to be sinful. Sin is overcome by sinning. From Act to Birth! From slavery to freedom.[2]

Clarkson shows a great interest in sexual sin. Echoing Bauthumley he begins, "Love is God, and God is Love; so all

---

[1] S.E., p. 5.

[2] S.E., p. 14.

IX6 pure, all, light, no spot in thee." Then he continues, "So that consider what act soever is done by thee, in light and love, is light, and lovely; though it be that act called Adultery, in darknesse it is so. . . ."[1] He adds that those who believe in sin and yet perform it, will sin, ". . . and for so sinning, thy imagination will pursue thee, arraign thee, and condemne thee for a Swearer, an adulterer and a theef."[2] Clarkson is happy to quote St. Paul: "Happy is the man that condemns not himself in those things that he alloweth of."[3]

In case his readers should think his doctrine strange--as well they might--he is also happy to go back to Isaiah 42:16, "I will lead the blind by a way that they knew not, and in paths they have not known: I will make darkness light. . . ." Clarkson is anxious to show that his Looking-glass Land is none other than the Promised Land!

> So in light I declare, that corrupt senses must put on incorruption . . . thou art risen from title to act, from act to power, from power to his name . . . for that now thou art of purer eyes than to behold any iniquity. . . .

and, here follows a remarkable conclusion:

> so that Devil is God, Hell is Heaven, Sin, Holiness, Damnation, Salvation, this and only this is the first Resurrection.[4]

---

[1] S.E., p. 10.

[2] S.E., loc. cit.

[3] Romans 14:22. Another text from this same chapter often used was 14:14.

[4] S.E., p. 14. Clarkson's "Looking-glass Land" is reminiscent of post-Marcion gnosticism and dualism. Taking a very

IX7 Here we probably have a good indication of another element in the Ranter practice of cursing: it is, in part, an affirmation of a credo, and cursing is blessing![1]

L.C. now ends the text proper with the following paragraph:

> . . . till I acted that so called sin, I could not predominate over sin; so that now whatsoever I act, is not in relation to the Title, to the Flesh, but that Eternity in me; So that with me, all Creatures are but one creature, and this in my form the Representative of the whole Creation: So that see what I can, act what I will, all is but one most sweet and lovely. Therefore my deer ones consider, that without act, no life; without life, no perfection, no everlasting Majesty, ruling, conquering, and damning all into it self, without end, for ever.[2]

Again, "Ram me, damn me!" the Ranters would cry!

So it follows, on this reasoning, that the greatest "sinner" is the most acceptable to God, a position also to be reached by way of an antinomian doctrine of Grace--to be

---

pessimistic view of the world and the Flesh, and believing the God of the O.T. to be false to Truth and in opposition to true Divinity, the Gnostics reasoned that the villains of the O.T. must be heroes. So the Ophites worshipped the Serpent as the Liberator and Illuminator of mankind, and they held the Fall to be a progress from ignorance to knowledge--an early version of the "Fall upwards" theory. Carpocratians, believing that salvation must depend upon gaining release from human law, taught that one must ignore the distinction between what is good and what is bad. These traits were recognized by contemporaries, and, in fact, The Ranters Recantation (London, 1650), names the Ranters as "the Gnostics of former ages."

[1] The reader will recall that this was Jacob Bauthumley's teaching also.

[2] S.E., p. 12.

IX8 perversely obtained from both Luther and St. Paul--and in fact implied in the teaching of Bauthumley.

It is further to be noted that within the confused and hazy notions in Clarkson's head is the thought that he is in some way like Christ. He, Clarkson, is the "Representative of all Creation": the "Eternity" dwells in him and in the virtue thereof he is "oned" with all Creation. The conception of Christ as Creation's "Representative" in whom "all things are summed up" seems originally to be Pauline[1] and it is developed in Greek theology[2] as a principle of atonement--anakephalaiosis--whereby the troubled and broken unity of a fallen world is healed in the divine-human nature of Christ.

L.C.'s rapturous inclination to see himself as a Christ figure was noticed by Gertrude Huehns when she read Clarkson's words, ". . . not only your Spirit, but your Body must be a living and acceptable Sacrifice, therefore till acted that so-called Sin, thou art not delivered from the power of Sin. . . ." The point in this, comments Huehns, appears to be a peculiar amalgam of two ideas, that of an imitation of Christ's sacrifice by suffering in the reputation of others--and also that of a complete denial of the existence of sin. . . .[3]

---

[1] Ephesians 1:10.

[2] Especially Irenaeus and Chrysostom.

[3] S.E., p. 14, and G. Huehns, Antinomianism in English History (London, Cresset Press, 1951), p. 47.

IX9 The "sacrifice" of reputation we noticed in Salmon,[1] and the idea constantly reappears in Ranter writing. Ranters are "made sin" for others.

The Familistic theme of "godded"men is a persistent one that is constantly threaded and woven through the confused patterns of esoteric, inward religion, but in L.C.'s case the connection is direct for he admits to association with the Family of Love in his pamphlet Truth Released from Prison to its former Libertie.[2]

The inconsistent and confused notions of God of which Bauthumley is guilty are likewise found in Clarkson. Neither writer seems to be able to make up his mind whether God be personal or not. In those circles of religious society in which Ranters and their like moved, where a babble of preachments and gospels was to be heard, this confusion was widespread. Writes L.C.: "I have travelled from one End of England to another, and as yet could find very few that could define unto me the Object of their Worship, or give me a Character what that God is, so much professed by them."[3] Clarkson, it seems, was hungry for that sort of speculation which was meat and drink to insatiable spiritual pilgrims.

---

[1] A Rout, a Rout, in his letter, "To the Fellowship of the Saints."

[2] Published in London in 1645 or 1646; "Epistle Dedicatory," p. D. The pamphlet has the printed date 1646 but Thomason has corrected this to 1645.

[3] S.E., "Preface."

IX10 He continues: ". . . yet notwithstanding I could come into no City, Town, nor Village, but there I heard the name God under one Form or another, worshipped that for God, which I had experience was no God."[1]

Like Bauthumley, Clarkson is already determined to become an iconoclast: "So that in the period of my Pilgrimage, I concluded there was gods many, and lords many, although to me but one God: Therefore at my return, I was carried forth to the Creature, the God yesterday, to day, and for ever."[2]

In his post-Ranter, Muggletonian days, Clarkson looks back at the ideas of God which he and others held, not only to that of the still divinity within, but to that of God as infinite, formless Spirit, "an infinite Nothing, or an infinite All . . . ," ideas directly gained from the teachings of Boehme.[3] Joined to this was belief that "when we die, we shall be swallowed up into the infinite Spirit, as a drop into the Ocean, and so be as we were. . . ."[4]

---

[1] Ibid.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Cf. De Electione Gratiae, i, 34, quoted above in Chapter IV. The idea was common in occult circles. It is expressed, for example, in the Cherubinischer Wandersmann of Angelus Silesius (1624-1677), strophe 25: "Gott ist ein lauter Nichts, ihn rührt kein Nun noch Hier; Je mehr du nach ihm greiffst, Je mehr entwind er dir."

[4] Cp. Salmon, Heights in Depths (1651), p. 3, where he writes that to return into Unity is "to finde our selves where we were before we were."

Concerning the Resurrection, it naturally follows that he was dubious: ". . . if ever we be raised again," he writes, "we shall rise a horse, a cow, a root, a flower, and such like, and so turn the world round as befor. . . ." This is not a very optimistic outlook! Indeed, Clarkson's pessimistic frame of mind is similar to that of Bauthumley, for he, Clarkson, writes, ". . . as for hell or damnation it is all here. . . .[1] And the only Devil that there is is what is in men and women!

With such a view of the world in which we live it can be no cause for surprise that L.C., as Jacob Bauthumley, denied the traditional doctrine of Resurrection: they did not want to be raised to life in these climes--transformed or not. They had had enough! But apparently, popular ideas of reincarnation crept in to take that doctrine's place. As a source of pessimism it was worse: having swept their chambers clean, worse devils entered in to take possession.

The concluding pages of The Single Eye contain a number of "Queries"--questions of doctrine framed in a rhetorical manner. We need not concern ourselves with all of them since their content has been already largely covered in what has been surveyed elsewhere. We may note, however, that L.C. is in agreement with Bauthumley upon such a point as that Good and Ill are complementaries which both manifest the Divine and

---

[1] L. Clarkson, Look About you for the Devil that is in You (London, 1659), pp. 96-98; Cf. p. 18.

IX12 serve its Will, the "good" man and the "bad," Pilate and Christ, Sin and Devil. In fact the idea of the Devil as a fallen angel who opposes God's will is overthrown. But so also is the idea of God: blind Creation worships that for God "which in the Original is no God." As he says in another place,[1] God and Devil are reduced to their doom, and consequently, "Thy Worship, and thy God shall dy truly."

Concerning the deification of illuminated man, the man of the Single Eye, he asks rhetorical questions which are really affirmations:

> Whether a creature living in God, so as to know God, as he is known of God, be not infinite with and in God; and so all things finite unto him, as unto God, whether Devil, Hell, Sin, Death, or any other thing soever?

"All is ours," the Ranters would cry! "My Majestie in me," says Clarkson!

Clarkson concludes, with Bauthumley, first that since God indwells all then there is no essential difference between man and beast; then that the "good" man and the "evil" man alike are saved (though there seems to be no idea what this could mean); and, finally, that God and Creature cannot be distinguished from one another. This intimidating and limiting doctrine is the expression of a suffocating claustrophobia which chokes all that Clarkson writes. Once, Scripture had been for L.C. a window into his darkened world through which the divine light streamed but now he writes that

---

[1] To be quoted in full shortly.

IX13 Scripture is full of false teaching, destroys divine Unity, is responsible for gods many and lords many, and causes conflict between men. His remarks are petulant.

All the main doctrines of L.C. are neatly and ably summarized in a poem which prefaces The Single Eye, though it cannot be claimed that this verse is a model of doctrinal clarity! Indeed, it illustrates very well the curious mélange of ideas and languages (pagan and Christian) which characterizes Ranter literature.

> Behold, the King of glory now is come
> T'reduce God, and Devil to their Doom;
> For both of them are servants unto Me
> That lives, and rules in perfect Majesty.
> Though called God, yet that is not my Name,
> True, I be both, yet am I not the same:
> Therefore a wonder am I to you all,
> So that to titul'd Gods ye pray and call.
> Oh then my Creature, let me speak to thee;
> Thy Worship and thy God, shall dy truly.
> Why dote ye Worldlings? up and down being hurled,
> As he is, so are we even in this World;
> And so are all things perfect, just and good;
> Yea, all are sav'd by's Cross, his wounds, and blood.
> Where else is heaven, but in our present peace
> From him? or hell, but when that this doth cease?
> Fie then for shame, look not above the Skies
> For God, or Heaven; for here your Treasure lies
> Even in these Forms, Eternal Will will reigne,
> Through him are all things, Onely One, not Twain:
> Sure he's the Fountain from which every thing
> Both good and ill (so term'd) appears to spring.
> Unto this Single Eye, though Adams two
> Cannot perceive, to Such, to All
> Adieu.

How came L.C. to this strange philosophy involving a denial of all the traditional moral teachings and values of his society? Plainly, we shall never be in a position to answer that question in its entirety. A principal part of this work has been given over to evoking the historical and

BEhold, the King of glory now is come
T'reduce God, and Devil to their Doom;
For both of them are ſervants unto Me
That lives, and rules in perfect Majeſty:
Though called God, yet that is not my Name,
True, I be both, yet am I not the ſame:
Therefore a wonder am I to you all,
So that to titul'd Gods ye pray and call.
Oh then my Creature, let me ſpeak to thee;
Thy Worſhip, and thy God, ſhall dy truly.
Why dote ye Worldlings? up and down being hurl'd;
As he is, ſo are We even in this World;
And ſo are all things perfect, juſt, and good;
Yea, all are ſav'd by's Croſs, his Wounds, and blood.
Where elſe is heaven, but in our preſent peace
From him? or hell, but when that this doth ceaſe?
Fie then for ſhame, look not above the Skies
For God, or Heaven; for here your Treaſure lies
Even in theſe Forms, Eternal Will *will reigne,*
Through him are all things, onely One, not Twain:
Sure he's the Fountain from which every thing
Both good and ill (ſo term'd) appears to ſpring.
Unto this Single Eye, *though* Adams *two*
Cannot perceive, to Such, to All
Adieu.

MVSEVM
BRITAN
NICVM

HAving experience that his Majeſty, the Being and Operation of all things, appeareth in and to the Creature under a two-fold Form or Viſage, by which that becometh real with the Creature, which is but a ſhadow with this Infinite Being: So that from hence it ariſeth, the Creature ſuppoſeth God to be that which is not, and that not to be, Which is God.

Therefore hath his Majeſty divulged his pleaſure, that thereby he may take occaſion to unfold himſelf in and to the Creature under ſuch a proſpect, that the Creature may know God, as he is known of God, that ſo from the clear appearance of God, the Creature may behold purely what God is, Which as yet is manifeſt, the Creation in this Nation inhabiteth in no other Region then the Woman of Samaria: And therefore it is the cry of his Majeſty is not fulfilled and obeyed, but by Churches, Saints, and Devils oppoſed and contemned: So that rare it is to find the Creature that is awaked out of his deep ſleep, that hath ſhaked off the covering, ſo that he can from the clear Appearance of God ſay, the vail is taken away, and that he believeth the Truth as it is in his Majeſty.

In anſwer to this, I have travelled from one end of England to another, and as yet could find very feW that could define unto me the Object of their Worſhip, or give me a Character what that God is, ſo much profeſſed by them; yet notWithſtanding I could come into no City, Town, nor Village, but there I heard the name God under one Form or another, worſhipped that for God, which I had experience Was no God: So that in the period of my Pilgrimage, I concluded there Was gods many, and lords many, although to me but one God: Therefore at my return, I was carried out by God to hold forth to the Creature, the God yeſterday, to day, and for ever.

ideational factors which contributed to such a state of mind as his, but that by itself is not enough. The personal element is both vital to know about, and difficult to discover. In Clarkson's case we are fortunate in having his autobiographical The Lost Sheep Found of 1660. Here is a true case study of a Ranter!

Clarkson was born in 1615 in Preston, Lancashire. He was member of the Church of England and was nurtured in a very strict family.[1] The Lost Sheep Found purports to give an account of "the various leadings forth of my spirit through each Dispensation, from the year 1630, to this year 1660. . . ." This covers his life from his fifteenth year until his forty-fifth. He died aged fifty-two.

His is the history of an incorrigibly religious and anxious soul, a "spiritual nomad" ever seeking spiritual consolation; but each spiritual habitat left "fiery darts of sin" cankering in his soul, and he says that the more "I laboured for perfect cure and peace in my soul the further I was from it. . . ." The Angel, or perhaps the Spectre, of Perfection, clung heavily to his neck all his days.

Laurence displayed an early and possibly precocious interest in religion. Even at the age of fifteen he went about "peeping in at church dores" seeking one who preached

---

[1] This account of Clarkson's story is taken directly from his own straight-forward account in The Lost Sheep Found. Only especially important quotations are given page references.

IX15 Christ more truly and powerfully than another, since, he says of himself with some smugness, ". . . my heart not being altogether void of some small discerning." When he heard thunderings against superstition, and sin, and the profaning of the Lord's Day, "tears would run down my cheeks for joy," he says.

Firm opinions in ecclesiology were formed as early: "Then the ministers had an Order, that none should receive the Sacrament, but such as would receive it at the rayled Altar kneeling, which I could not do. . . ." Instead he went where he could receive it sitting.

At home, he was under his father's tuition, and he "would force me to read over the prayers in the book of Common-prayer and Practice of Piety, which I have done, till they have fallen asleep, and myself. . . ." But this became disagreeable to him: "I judged to pray another man's form, was vaine babbling, and not acceptable to God." L.C.'s God was a hard master!

Asking his parents' blessing was another thing at which the boy scrupled, for he had a scornful opinion of his father:

> Often times in the winter mornings, after I have been out of my bed, I have stood freezing above, and deerst not come down till my father was gone abroad, and the reason I was satisfied, the blessing or prayers of a wicked man God would not hear, and so should offend God to ask him blessing. . . .

This somewhat offensive trait of self-righteousness and condescension to others, though inwardly counter-balanced by a melancholic guilt and fear, presents itself as a persistent theme in L.C.'s story.

IX16 He goes on to record that he devoted himself to the study of doctrine, and many times with tears he "privatly sought the Lord . . . whether those things the puritanical Priests preached, was my own," and became only more troubled. He became fearful that he was an hypocrite, and terrified that this would bring about his damnation. The fear of hell brought him out "all in a sweat," and he was afraid also that "some sin shut the attention of God from me. . . ." His feelings were close to those of L. Muggleton as we have already noticed him, and it happened that Muggleton was destined to become an important figure to L.C. in the last stages of his life. It was in the faith of Muggleton's "six-foot god" that they both eventually found refuge from their fear.

It is interesting to notice that even in 1660, forty-five years later, L.C. can still vividly recall the crude ideas which he gained at Church. His God was ". . . a grave, ancient, holy, old man . . . in Heaven in a chair of gold . . . and the Devil, some deformed person . . . a great Scar-croe, insomuch that every black thing I saw in the night, I thought was the devil. . . ." A palatial "Heaven," and an abyssal "Hell" reeking of brimstone, both peopled with appropriate inhabitants, were also part of his Cosmos. Such ideas were commonplace and not discouraged by the clergy, so that it is no cause for wonder if people of some intelligence looked elsewhere, to the inner, and sometimes mystical teachings of the sects for more profound and enlightened notions. Seekerism

IX17 was often as much a sign of intellectual discontent as it was of spiritual awakening.

L.C. himself at this point left the Church of England for Presbytery, and found himself "burning brick in Egypt" but "knowing no more light." He perfunctorily dismissed the difference between Episcopal and Presbyterian as "only a few superstitious Rites and Ceremonies."

Now the War broke out, and the Presbyterians gained power "so their pride and cruelty increased. . . ." So he left them to become an Independent. He notes that "as wars increased so variety of Judgments increased."[1]

Now he went to see Dr. Crispe,[2] the antinomian, from whom he learned that though one walked all alone, "yet if he believed that Christ Jesus died for him, God beheld no iniquity in him." Laurence made straight for the Scripture and there found it proved though before he had doubted that Christ died for all men. And to this doubt he returned after his Ranter days were done. For the moment, however, L.C. rested a Crispian antinomian. He was strengthened in this faith by an encounter with "Randel (who) appeared with Mr. Simpson, with such a Doctrine as Doctor Crisp, onely higher and clearer. . . ."[3]

---

[1] L.C.'s comments on the times and conditions run parallel to those of Muggleton, quoted above in Chapter IV, to an extraordinary degree.

[2] See above, Chapter V.

[3] Randall, it will be recalled, was a publisher, and an associate of Dr. John Everard. As a Familist preacher he was very well known in London, especially during the sixteen-forties.

IX18 We should take note of the fact that Randall, who was known as a Familist of the authentic variety, is here portrayed as preaching a gospel of Free-Grace. Such a doctrine had no place in Familism as such. From this we can gain an impression of the common eclecticism which was a mark of the sectary. There was a free flowing of ideas of every sort in the England of this period, swirling and eddying in every corner, however tiny. Ideas were picked up by individuals and commingled with others to suit an individual pleasure. Where mystery is the heart of religious belief, consistency of thought is unnecessary.

L.C. found that the antinomian movement suited him better than others he had tested but, even so, it did not provide a full salvation for his troubled spirit: he was still partly in bondage so, as he puts it, "I left all Church-fellowship, and burning Brick in Egypt, and travelled with them up and down the borders, part Egypt, and part Wilderness."

He remained in this sect for some time, "for Church it was none," and, having "notable gifts of prayer," he "began to be somebody amongst them." At this juncture, L.C. adjudged himself to be one of the Saints, for "this was God's Kingdom and we his people."

He became acquainted with Paul Hobson, a fine preacher and prayer, who was serving in the Army. So "with him I went, and there tarried a soldier with them," and there he practiced his preaching. He preached in Suffolk and Norfolk, "which thing I was ambitious of, as also to gain some silver."

IX19 He settled down at Pulem for twenty shillings a week and there preached Free-Grace. The theme seems to have been very popular for people drifted over from other parishes and L.C. was accused of "sheep stealing." He was turned out by a conspiracy of clergy and roamed about the open country preaching freely. He chose to stay with a Robert Marchant, at his "Lodging place, because his daughter I loved."

Now L.C. met up with the Baptists[1] by way of one John Tyler, and went up to London where, on 6 November, 1644, he was rebaptized in the somewhat dubious water of the Tower Moat. Thence back to Suffolk where all were glad to see him, especially the young women, he notes, for he was very popular among the daughters of his friends! He continued baptizing knowing that "this Command of Christ did as really belong to me as to them (the Apostles) and we having the very same rule, as Elders and Deacons, with Dipping, and Breaking of Bread in the same manner as they, I was satisfied we onely were the Church of Christ in this world." He continued to baptize with great gusto and with apparent success. Then the clergy obtained his arrest.

Here in his story, L.C. mentions his wife who insists upon accompanying him to his Examination. Until now he has omitted to announce his marriage! It emerges that his was a marriage by consent, not by Law. Questioned about this by the

---

[1] Like Coppe, he accepts without demur the nomenclature "Anabaptist." Cp. p. 13.

IX20 Magistrate, he declares, "Marriage is no other, but a free consent in love each to the other before God, and who was sufficient to publish the Contract as myself?" And he insisted that he could prove that he was married "according to the word of God."[1]

L.C.'s account of his Examination by the Authority at St. Edmunds-Bury shows him articulate and shrewd. His reporting is vivid both in nuance and detail.

He was accused, he says, of dipping men and women naked: this he denied. But he admitted to performing the baptisms at night. The tone of the Examination--as L.C. reports it--is well illustrated by the following exchange:

> Did you not dip six Sisters there-about at one time? I never dipped six at one time. Then said Sir John Rowse, we are informed you dipped six Sisters one night naked. That is nothing to me what you are informed, for I never did such a thing; Nay, further, it is reported, that which of them you liked best, you lay with her in the water? Surely your experience teacheth you the contrary, that nature hath small desire to copulation in water, at which they laughed. . . .[2]

---

[1] Clarkson's account of his marriage "by free consent" sounds, whatever the truth of the matter, a good deal more serious than the mockery described in The Routing of the Ranters (London, 1650), p. 6. This story is of a brash fellow who took up with a girl and escorted her to a tavern where they ate bread together and took wine, and declared themselves man and wife. These solemn rites enacted, the girl was directed home where the man lived, and finding a sturdy housewife in possession of the nest, blithely and hopefully recounted her story. For her pains she received several stout blows on the head with a broomstick!

[2] John Donne's comments on another occasion might serve here: ". . . the voyce and sound of the Snake and Goose is all one." From "Biathanatos."

IX21 The altercation continued in this vein. Clarkson was committed to imprisonment, 24 January, 1645, in a house where, he is anxious to point out, "none but men of Quality are kept. . . ."

During his imprisonment he received money "from the Army, and the Churches at London and Colchester." He preached still--from the prison window. He was an ardent Baptist! But in the tranquillity of his house arrest his endless capacity for speculation asserted itself again. He began to wonder--as the Seekers wondered--whether there had been any true baptism since the Apostles died. Sadly he concluded that he was "burning Brick still" so, "seeing the vanity of the Baptists, I renounced them. . . ." Only prayer and preaching he thought might justly continue![1]

Then, again to London, to find the Seekers, many of whom had fallen, as he, from the Baptists. Here he put out a book, his first, entitled The Pilgrimage of Saints by church cast out, in Christ found, seeking the truth.[2] It was sold for him by Randall the Familist.

At this point--The Lost Sheep Found being meant as a pious testimonial to the work of the Spirit in his soul--L.C. confides in his readers that "all along in this my travel

---

[1] "Lawrence Clarkson turned from Anabaptist and Dipper to be a Seeker and to deny the Scriptures to be the rule of a Christian. He denied that in doctrine or practice half of God's glory was revealed as yet." Edwards' Gangraena (London, 1646), p. 20, Sec. 2, Pt. I.

[2] 1645? This work appears to be no longer extant; although L.C. does not tell us so, it was condemned by Parliament.

IX22 (travail?) I was subject to that sin": he refers to fornication. He is moved to this disclosure by recall of a friend's suicide over such an affaire. L.C. tells us that his sin he bore "saint like, as though sin were a burden to me. . . ." His self-congratulation done he castigates himself for his spiritual and moral weakness, but "notwithstanding that I had great knowledge in the things of God." He sighs over his vanity and the "conceit of Reasons imagination."

Next, to Kent! There he preached that God did not dwell in Temples made with hands but in every Believer. At Canterbury L.C. found a believing maid "of pretty knowledge who with my doctrine was much affected. . . ." Indeed she was for she consented to L.C.'s amorous embraces that very night. "Afterwards the mayd was highly in love with me," he confides. Unfortunately, the faithful there soon lost confidence in him, and the maid married someone else. So, adds L.C., in his artless manner, "there was an end to any further progress in Kent."

On his next visit to London, Clarkson "remained preaching at Bowe in Mr. Sterry's place. . ." and thereafter went up and down in town and country seeking out the Seekers and preaching Free-Grace.

Material prosperity failed him and "at this I concluded that all was a cheat, yea preaching itself. . . ." This frame of mind remained with him. Sourly he declared that private property was a human invention, and the cause of theft, IX23 cheating, and lying. These terms had no validity, he argued, being invented only by property owners to protect their own interests.[1] Fortunately he found political pamphleteering more profitable than preaching, and he got twelve pounds for a petulant book written against "the Commonality of England."[2] These twenty-nine pages reflect the irritation with the Establishment, both civil and ecclesiastical, of a man down on his luck.[3]

Disillusioned, disgruntled--though finding temporary relief as preacher to an Army regiment--he was ready for his next spiritual adventure.

Had he not heard, a friend asked him, "of a people called My One Flesh?"

He had not, but plainly what his friend told him aroused his ready curiosity for he speedily sought out Giles Calvert, the seller of occult and mystical books in St. Paul's Churchyard, to discover more. Calvert, says our wanderer, "was afraid I came to betray them, but exchanging a few words in the height of my language, he was much affected, and satisfied I was a friend of theirs."

---

[1] L.S.F., p. 27.

[2] A Generall Charge or Impeachment of High-Treason in the Name of Justice Equity, against the Communality of England; as was presented by Experienced Reason, Anno 1647.

[3] L.S.F., p. 24.

IX24 One can only attempt to imagine what this high-flying language was, but it was a type of speech with which Calvert was familiar, and possibly L.C. was to him a type of character as familiar. We do not know what Calvert's own interest was in "My One Flesh," but in any case, he wrote L.C. a note to a certain Mr. Brush, "and the effect thereof was, the bearer hereof is a man of the greatest light I ever yet heard speak, and for ought I know instead of receiving him you may receive an Angel." Mr. Brush admitted him to his house and told L.C. that if he had come a little earlier he "might have seen Mr. Copp, who then had lately appeared in a most dreadful manner." Conversation ensued but L.C. says that what they had to say was "nothing to what was in me."

L.C.'s beliefs at that time, as he records them, were substantially what we have seen in the Single Eye, published about three years after Clarkson's encounter with the "One Flesh." Concerning them he says that he had a great desire "to make trial whether I should be troubled or satisfied therein," that is, in committing those deeds usually adjudged sinful as if they were not so. Accordingly he set about convincing the members of "My One Flesh," an undertaking which did not prove difficult though their understanding "was not so high as was in me experienced."[1] Unfortunately, L.C. does

---

[1] Again a comment of John Donne may serve us here: "It is all the comfort the guilty have, not to find any innocent." From "Biathanatos."

IX25 not tell what he found that group's beliefs to be when he met them; we must remain somewhat in the dark as indeed we noted in our chapter on Abiezer Coppe.

The house of a Mr. Wats in Rood-Lane was the place where the novel experiment was undertaken on a philosophical basis of two assumptions. One assumption was that "all women are one woman," and the other that "to the pure all things are pure."

At this point (what had been noised abroad we cannot tell) the ranting company began to grow apace so that now L.C. "had choice of what before I aspired after. . . ." Upon receiving his pay (for apparently L.C. was in agreement with the Scripture that reads, "Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn)," L.C. repaired to Rood-Lane on a more permanent basis. There, he records, "I had clients many, that I was not able to answer all desires, yet none knew our actions but ourselves; however, I was careful with whom I had to do."

In spite of this precautionary silence, however, rumors reached the pricked ears of the Lord Mayor who sent Officers to restore public order and decency. But the birds, and their Fellow Creatures, had flown.

Though earlier Clarkson, on becoming a Seeker, had abandoned reliance on Scripture, he recalls that at this juncture he was guided by "Solomon's Writings" the "original of my filthy lust, supposing that he might take the same liberty he did." (This, as we noted earlier, was a well-

IX26 established notion among some of the Jorists and the Familists). L.C. says that he was then "moved to write to the world what my Principle was, so brought to publick view a Book called The Single Eye." This publication got him fame and disciples who were "restless till they were made free," and L.C. gained the sobriquet "Captain of the Rant."[1] To him mainly pertained the duty to make knowledge available to women who came to seek it; he discharged his responsibilities in his lodgings, now known as The Head-quarters.

Together with these and other followers, L.C. praised the God who was an infinite Nothing for the great and glorious things that He had done in bringing them out of bondage into the perfect liberty of the sons of God. Nothing--save murder--was beyond the pale that limited their indulgence, says L.C., though he confesses that in tongue he professed the contrary.

L.C. was not without intelligence, neither was he even yet without a conscience. He was therefore stirred to uneasiness by the disinterested idealism of social reformers like Winstanley and Everard.[2] So he scoffs at them, accusing them of vain-glory and demagoguery. His view of them was symptomatic of his whole jaundiced condition for, "I saw all that men spake or acted, was a lye, and therefore my thought

---

[1] Time has been telescoped in L.S.F. and there is no satisfactory account of the period 1647-1650. But it must have been during this period that L.C. reached his characteristic viewpoint.

[2] Not John Everard but another.

IX27 was, I had as good cheat for something among them, and that so I might live in prosperity with them. . . .

The black bird of melancholy came and rested in Laurence's heart. He lay his thoughts upon the saying of Solomon:

> For that which befalleth the sons of men, befalleth beasts; even one thing befalleth them; as the one dieth, so dieth the other . . . a man hath no preheminence above a beast . . . all is vanity.

There was nothing for it but to eat, drink, and be merry--to delight himself, as he professes, in his mental gifts, for that "in the grave there was no more remembrance of either joy or sorrow after."

L.C. philosophizes:

> For this I conceived, as I knew not what I was before I came in being, so for ever after I should know nothing after this my being was dissolved; but even as a stream from the Ocean was distinct in itself while it was a stream, but when returned to the Ocean, was therein swallowed and became one with the Ocean; so the spirit in man . . . became one with God, yea God it self.[1]

But even with this L.C. was not content, "fearing this should not be so." In this condition, he says, a cup of wine would wash his doubts away. So far was L.C. strayed away from faith and hope that even such a general pantheism offered him comfort; but anxious fear yet dogged his steps and he was afraid that even that might not be true. He was in a pathetic condition, not knowing what to believe and even mixing up beliefs that were incompatible. He was a Lost Sheep indeed!

---

[1] L.S.F., p. 28.

IX28 In this nihilistic frame of mind, depressed and desperate, L.C. and his erring flock of ewes, like Nebuchadnezzar, cropped grass. "Taverns I called the house of god; and the Drawers, Messengers; and Sack, Divinity; reading in Solomon's writings it must be so, in that it made glad the heart of God."[1]

L.C.'s slight mis-allusion to the Psalmist's thanksgiving for wine "that maketh glad the heart of man" is highly suggestive and leads us to look again at a pamphlet, The Ranters Ranting, published anonymously in 1650. L.C.'s words encourage us not to dismiss the contents of this booklet as mere anti-Ranter propaganda. It may serve here to amplify Clarkson's own account of his doings and those of his coterie.

The pamphlet sets the scene in an inn, the "David and Harp" in Moore-Lane, Parish of St. Giles, Cripplegate, and it pictures the rowdy Ranters singing bawdy songs to the delightfully solemn melodies of David's Psalms, a droll thought indeed! Then said one to another, "Welcome fellow-creature!" One lowered his breeches and another bade the others come and kiss their God, "which they all did by kissing his buttock."[2] One said, "Ram me, dam me . . ." and said that by the word "Ram" they meant God.

---

[1] L.S.F., p. 29.

[2] See Frontispiece. This material is largely reproduced in Collins, L, Strange News from Newgate (London, 1651), and Anon., The Routing of the Ranters (London, 1650).

IX29

> . . . there comes into the room a man with a pottle of sack, and a glasse in his hand uttering these words, viz. Where doth God want any wine, to which presently answered one that had his minion on his knee, here, here, at which words the glasse of sack was given him, and he drank to his fellow-creatures. . . .

They drank a toast to him "in whom they live, move, and have a being," and one man took a candle and went up and down, peering about, and said, "That he lookt for his sins, but they were not there, he could find none. . . ."[1] Included in these Ranter skits were one on the Eucharist, performed in beef and ale, and one on ancient baptismal rites performed with the aid of tobacco, for one smoking "and blowing through two pieces of Tobacco-pipes he said, That was the breath of God. . . ."[2]

Ranter revellings are said to have continued all night until,

> ten of the clock the next day, by which time, they having satisfied themselves with chamber exercise they fetch a walk towards Smithfield, and went into Charterhouse Lane, where they had a lesson played on the Organs, danced mixed dances, and had an Antick mask. . . .[3]

and the church rafters echoed merrily!

---

[1] N. Cohn, The Pursuit of the Millennium (New York: Harper Torchbook, 1961), p. 335, has occasion to mention this item which he dignifies by referring to it as "the language of mystical antinomianism." Undoubtedly, it was a touching charade!

[2] Collins, Strange Newes . . . . This is an addition to the matter in The Ranters Ranting.

[3] The Ranters Ranting, p. 4. This pamphlet also quotes a melancholy drinking song which runs as follows:

IX30 It is, of course, impossible to verify such stories, but one may say that they are not inconsistent with the story that L.C. himself tells. In that case, what is one to make of these people and their performances? We may be fairly certain that these Ranter charades based upon Christian sacraments had no serious intention but mockery. The participants meant only to ridicule the Church and her institutions rather as children secretly make fun of their school-teachers and others who would discipline and restrain them.

The anonymous author of The Routing of the Ranters calls these persons "Ranters, alias Claxtonians and Coppanists." These may not be ill-chosen terms for we do not know that this conduct of the "mad Crue" was imitated by Salmonists or by followers of J. Bauthumley though, these latter, as we previously noticed, are described by George Fox as having attended a meeting where they "sunge, and whistled and danced."[1]

Drink today and drown all sorrow
You shall perhaps not do't tomorrow,
Best while you have it use your breath,
There is no drinking after death.
Wine wakes the Heart up, wakes the Wit,
There is no cure 'gainst Age, but it;
It helps the head-ache, Cough, and Tissick,
And is for all diseases Physick.
Then let us swill, boys, for our Health;
Who drinks well, loves the Common-Wealth:
And he that will to bed go sober,
Falls with the leaf still in October.

[1] G. Fox, Journal (Penney), p. 152. Although apparently a characteristic mode of behavior of Ranters we do not know that all groups of Ranters were similar. Still, they are described as behaving in this way also in the Swarthmore MSS, iv, 63, referring to a meeting at Kidsley Park near Derby in 1654: there they "began to singe, whisell, and swear."

IX31 But, in any case, this is a slightly less degree of unorthodox conduct! One of L.C.'s most explicit remarks about the Claxtonians' behavior says, "We had several meetings of great company, and that some, no mean ones neither, where then, and at that time, they improved their liberty, where Doctor Pagets maid stripped herself naked, and skipped among them. . . ."[1]

Then the axe fell! The Single Eye was in print, and brought before a Parliamentary Committee, the questions fell thick and fast about L.C.'s head like leaves on a stormy autumn day:

> Did you ever lodge in Rood lane? Once I did. Who were those women in black Bags that came to you? As now I know not. But Mr. Claxton, we are informed, you have both wives and maidens that lodgeth with you there! Those that informed you, let them appear face to face, for I never lay with any but my own wife. No! for you call evry woman your wife? I say I lye with none but my wife, according to Law, though in the unity of the spirit, I lye with all the creation.[2]

"That is your sophistication," was the retort. "Sophistry" would have done as well.

> Do you know one Copp? Yea, I know him, and that is all for I have not seen him above two or three times. Then they said, this is a sad principle, which if not routed, all honest men will have their wives deluded. One of them said, he feared not his wife she was too old. . . .

L.C.'s sentence to banishment, promulgated 27 September, 1650, was never carried out, but no reason for this is known.

---

[1] L.S.F., p. 28.

[2] L.S.F., p. 30.

IX32 He appears to have remained in custody for about three months, after which, he avows, he "continued (his) Ranting principle, with a high hand."

His wild wanderings brought him to the Never-never land of Astrology, and he aspired further to the "art of Magick" and "to raise spirits." He attempted even to "raise the devil, that so I might see what he was, but all in vain, so that I judged all was a lie, and that there was no devil at all, nor indeed no God but onely nature. . . ."

Faith exhausted, L.C.'s doubts about the Scripture finally became overt, for he writes that when,

> I have perused the Scriptures I have found so many contradictions . . . that I had no faith in it at all, no more than a history . . . I neither believed that Adam was the first Creature, but there was a Creation before him, which world I thought was eternal . . . (and) I really believed no Moses, Prophets, Christ, or Apostles, nor no resurrection at all . . . for I understood that which was life in man, went into that infinite Bulk and Bigness, so called God . . . and the body rotted in the grave, and for ever to remain.

We should like to stay with Laurence Clarkson in his wanderings through Egypt and the Wilderness, in the maze of belief and unbelief, of hope and despair, but this would be superfluous to our theme. It must here suffice us to note that in January or February, 1657, he met up with John Reeve, the Muggletonian prophet, and enlisted himself in that sect. For a formless Divine Spirit who was an Infinite Nothing, he now substituted a God who "was in the form of a man, clearer then Chrystal, brighter than the Sun, swifter then

IX33 thought."[1]

His calling and election were now made sure, and he was able to declare that there was "No true Bishop in the world beside the Author": his incipient megalomania comes to his rescue. As far as can be told, L.C. died in the Muggletonian faith, savedby his "six-foot god," though one suspects that he may have been moving on in his restless imagination to new speculations about yet other spiritual countries. In the end likely he concluded with Solomon--as he had often reflected--that all was vanity.[2]

Concluding Remarks

Clarkson's ranterism comes closest to what we read in the popular anti-Ranter literature. In particular, it displays the confused and desperate nihilism to which that literature witnesses. The "Claxtonian" element in the "My One Flesh" epitomizes roisterous ranterism among simple people, unskilled in self-government, easily seduced by a cunning mind and a honeyed tongue. They lived in rough, immoderate days, and fell easily into extremes of behavior.

Whereas there are recognizable indications of a positive religious experience in the Ranter careers of Salmon and

---

[1] L. Clarkson, Look About you for the Devil (London, 1657), "Preface": The God of Joseph Smith, the Mormon patriarch, seems to be very similar to the Muggletonian God. Muggleton's Acts of the Witnesses (London, 1699), Ch. vi, pp. 80ff, gives an account of Clarkson as an upstart; Cf. pp. 20ff, and 45f.

[2] L.S.F., p. 29.

IX34 Coppe--and neuter in Bauthumley--Clarkson's displays only negative. His experience of the Holy being only in terms of wrath and fear, he is untransported by any vision of glory, undismayed by any divine Abyss, untroubled by any daemonic ecstasy. His God is not dead--though he might wish it so--but is Anxiety, Judgment, and Punishment. His God, appropriately for his Looking-glass Land, is the Devil!

Awareness of divine Wrath, and fear of Hell, might be considered by many--and certainly in Clarkson's own day--a normal part of religious experience. Yet in a healthy religious mind, this would be balanced by a trust in divine Mercy and over-ruling Providence. But the sad Clarkson was pestered by a scrupulous puritanical conscience which dogged his feet like the Hound of Heaven. Like Saltmarsh, the antinomian, he saw himself not only as unloved but as unlovable.

He seems to have been given to the heady delights of lascivious passion from an early age and would constantly fall into illegitimate amours. Though bolstering his insecure vanity, his self-satisfaction was short-lived for he sweated in fear of Hell. He could love and trust his Heavenly Father no more than he could his earthly, and he doubted that God could "be changed by prayers so as to expiate a judgment, or produce a deliverance." This divine Tyrant demanded of him an impossible standard--no less than perfection itself. Frail human flesh cannot support such an ideal, and if it become an obsession, it will lead to despair and to breakdown.

An impossible demand on the one side, and threat of eternal punishment on the other, will destroy the balance of anyone of the least sensitivity. Hence, aspiration to be a "Mary" or a "Christ" led to becoming a "Nebuchadnezzar." Addiction to the mythology of mysticism could be dangerous. Such extremes of religious idealism were not uncommon in the fervid religious atmosphere of the mid-seventeenth century. Baxter remarks that the Presbyterian ministers ran from libertinism into the other extreme and became intolerant of many persons "worthy instruments and members in the churches."[1] The zeal of their preaching was not always well placed and--as Baxter remarks elsewhere--"If you discover an error to an injudicious man he reeleth into the contrary error, and it is hard to stop him in the middle verity."[2] Preachers who commanded their flock to be perfect as their heavenly Father was perfect, and then threatened their Father's anger were not always so delicate as to consider that their flock contained injudicious and weak persons who were not able to bear it, and the result could on occasion be a sorry one. It could be a falling-away from the church (as we noticed in Chapter IV) or it could be personal ruin.

Baxter recounts the story of an intimate friend with whom he walked, read, and prayed, whose charity was equal to

---

[1] R. Baxter, Reliquiae Baxterianae (1696), ed. J.M. Lloyd Thomas (London: Dent, 1925), p. 90.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 99.

IX36 his great zeal, and whom, says Baxter, "God made . . . a great means of my good, who had more knowledge than he, but a colder heart."

> Yet before we had been two years acquainted he fell once and a second time by the power of temptation into a degree of drunkenness, which so terrified him upon the review (especially after the second time) that he was near to despair, and went to good ministers with sad confessions. And when I had left the house and his company, he fell into it again and again so oft that at last his conscience could have no relief or ease but in changing his judgement and disowning the teachers and doctrines which had restrained him . . . And the last I heard of him was that he was grown a fuddler and railer of strict men. . . .[1]

So it is that one might be moved to reject all because one could not attain all, and a "good minister," a soul's physician, might not always be able to cure the disease.[2] Baxter himself

---

[1] *Ibid.*, p. 8.

[2] The problem of guilt received widespread attention during this period. Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, Act V, Scene iii, writes,

Canst thou not minister to a mind diseased,
Pluck from the memory a rooted sorrow,
Raze out the written troubles of the brain,
And, with some sweet oblivious antidote,
Cleanse the stuff'd bosom of that perilous stuff
Which weighs upon the heart?

Robert Burton's *Anatomie of Melancholy*, published in 1621, was very successful. Said Thomas Fuller, "Scarce any book of philology hath in so short a time passed so many impressions." The editions followed fast upon each other in 1621, 1624, 1628, 1632, 1638, and 1651. There were two more editions during the century, 1660 and 1676. The ninth edition appeared in 1800. This work is discussed in a book by L. Babb, *Sanity in Bedlam: A Study of Robert Burton's Anatomy of Melancholy* (Michigan: Michigan State University Press, 1959). Another useful study of Melancholy is made in the same author's book, *The Elizabethan Malady* (East Lansing: Michigan State College Press, 1951); of particular interest to students of religion is the Third Part of Burton's work, Section 4, Members 1 and 2, "Religious Melancholy."

IX37 tried to help many. He records that he was visited by "multitudes of melancholy persons," some of high quality, some of low, some very exquisitely learned, some unlearned. . . ." They were troubled by guilt for sexual sin, or else by "melancholy phantasms and passions" which they (he felt wrongly) ascribed to God's Spirit; or else, their religion was placed "too much in fears and tears and scruples. . . ." He referred these multitudes, he says, to "that obedience, love and joy in which true religion doth principally consist."[1] But it seems that Baxter's idea of "true religion" was not shared by all his brethren. Winstanley became convinced, "no doubt both by personal experience and observation, that the omnipresent fear of damnation among the Puritans was a fruitful source of mental disorder. . . ."[2]

Religious melancholia arrested Winstanley's attention. Of Puritan "divine doctrine" he wrote:

> It is a doctrine of a sickly and weak spirit who hath lost his understanding . . . (who) runs into fancies either of joy or sorrow.
>
> And if the passion of joy predominate, then he fancies to himself a personal God, personal angels, and a local place of glory which he saith he and all who believe what he saith shall go to, after they are dead.

---

[1] Baxter continued to occupy himself with this ministry and became well-known as a counselor for melancholic souls. In 1683 he published a sermon, "The Cure of Melancholy and Overmuch Sorrow by Faith and Physick," which went at once through several editions and several more in the early seventeen hundreds.

[2] G.H. Sabine, The Works of Gerrard Winstanley (New York: Cornell University Press, 1948), p. 48.

IX38 With irony he continues:

> And if sorrow predominate, then he fancies to himself a personal devil and a local place of torment that he shall go to after he is dead, and this he speaks with great confidence.

Echoing the adage that "much thinking maketh a man mad," he continues--speaking of the sorrowful soul:

> Then he is heavy and sad, crying out, He is damned, God hath forsaken him, and he must go to hell when he die, he cannot make his calling and election sure.

Such persons murder themselves, he says.[1]

Clarkson's unsureness of God's love and of his justice is no isolated case. Another example is provided by Muggleton who has already exemplified for us an apparently not uncommon reaction to Puritan preaching. He himself, it will be remembered, abandoned the Church. But it is convenient here to mention a few other thoughts of Muggleton's busy head.

Muggleton recalls how he would meditate upon such things as Paul's talk of "vessels made for destruction" which Calvinists would quote as an example of divine Predestination. God, it seemed to Muggleton, was a Prerogative Power above all Law. Miserably he writes, "When I considered this, I wished in myself that I had never been born." Reasoning with himself, quite undone by his reflections upon the immutable, awful God who was above all Law and all respect of persons, Muggleton thought to himself, "There can be no Hell until the

---

[1] Sabine, quoted Winstanley's Law of Freedom (1652), op. cit., pp. 60ff.

IX39 day of Judgment; until God raises men there can be no condemnation!" And he hoped that there would be no Resurrection at all so that he might lie still in the earth for ever.[1] Ranters came also, as Muggleton, to deny the Christian doctrine of bodily resurrection; likely their thought was sometimes fathered by a similar wish!

So it is that fear and despair lead to abandonment both of ethical ideals and codes, and also of orthodox religious doctrines. Baxter says that he does not know what became of his friend, but it is at least possible that he became a Ranter like the despairing friends of Muggleton. The despair of Clarkson led him also to the abandonment of reason: the world, he says, is the Devils Kingdom, and Reason "the Lord thereof." He provides a ready example of the way in which this abandonment--a staple of inner religion--can link itself with despairing antinomianism.

As for "hell and damnation," wrote Clarkson, "it is all here." One can almost hear him sigh! And, certainly his were not good times for either political agitator or religious sectary. Authority was almost unbelievably savage in dealing with such recalcitrants. Starvings and torturings in jail were usual. Public whippings and pilloryings were everyday occurrences. Ear clippings, nose slittings, tongue borings, were commonplace. One had only to go down the street to see

---

[1] Muggleton, op. cit., p. 28.

IX40 a bloody execution--a morbid and popular diversion which cannot have failed to produce a morbid reaction in many. There is no surviving evidence for Ranter executions but persecutions, as is to be expected, were normal. Clarkson himself, as far as we know, did not suffer unduly but he must have known many who endured the brutal inhumanity of the gaol. His dark outlook may have been somewhat affected by this. But a more principal reason for it was undoubtedly his self-disgust, disguised by an attitude of great superiority. Another was his malcontent with his lot in life. Life, for him, was all a cheat and a lie, and he gave no credence to disinterested idealism in anyone. One might see his Ranterism, as that of other members of "My One Flesh" as a form of self-destruction, as Winstanley hints. Donne remarks, "Sinne hath the nature of Poyson, that it enters easiest, and works fastest upon cholerique constitutions."[1] The poison can, of course, be deliberately self-administered.

Earlier we wondered whether Clarkson was a charlatan? To this question we must finally reply in the negative. As far as one can see, he was a man of averagely good intelligence but injudicious: a man who would run to extremes and who would never rest in the middle verity. In many ways he was the victim of his times--trapped between the extremes of totalitarianism and crude dogma on one side, and anarchy and

---

[1] Donne, "Biathanatos."

IX41 extreme subjectivity on the other. His were times when feeling ran high and reason was often discounted.

He was far from irreligious. In the end, he was, as in the beginning, incorrigibly religious, but he exhibits in stark detail the negative and destructive possibilities inherent in a religious system in which guilt and fear are cultivated as prime movers.

A tormented spiritual nomad, lost in the Wilderness under a clouded sky, he appears to typify in a remarkable way the Ranter who was the hapless example of the moralist preacher, and the butt of lewd songs in the taverns.

SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY

Note: The works of the Ranter leaders and of Peter Sterry are arranged in order of date of publication but, otherwise, all works are in alphabetical order.

Section A: Works published before 1700

Anonymous A Brief Discovery of the Blasphemous Doctrine of Familism. London, 1645.

_______. A jvstyficatjion of the mad Crew. London, 1650. This work is attributed to L. Clarkson by Nat. Webbe and Wm. Grantham in The Ranters Reasons (London, 1651).

_______. A List of the Grand Blasphemers and Blasphemies. London, 1654.

_______. A looking-glass for the Ranters. London, 1653.

_______. A Nest of Serpents Discovered, or a Knot of Old Heretiques Revived called the Adamites. London, 1641.

_______. A Supplication of the Family of Love. London, 1606.

_______. An Apology for the Service of Love. London, 1650.

_______. Cloathing for the Naked Woman. London, 1652.

_______. The Arraignment and Tryall with a Declaration of the Ranters. London, 1650.

_______. The Ranters Creed. London, 1651.

_______. The Ranters Monster. London, 1652.

_______. The Ranters Ranting. London, 1650.

_______. The Ranters Recantation. London, 1650.

_______. The Ranters Religion. London, 1650.

_______. The Ranting Rambler. London, Undated.

2 _______. The Ranting Whores Resolution. (No place), 1662-63.

_______. The Routing of the Ranters. London, 1650.

_______. Theologia Germanica. London MS by Jno. Everard, 1628.

Barclay, Robert. The Anarchy of the Ranters and Other Libertines. London, 1676.

Basel, Governor of the University. David Gorge . . . a very Blasphemer. English tr. Anon. 1560.

Bauthumley, J. The Light and Dark Sides of God. London, 1650.

_______. A Brief Historicall Relation . . . collected out of the Acts and Ordinances of the Church. Written by Mr. Fox. London, 1676.

Baxter, R. Reliquiae Baxterianae (1696) ed. by J.M. Lloyd Thomas, London: Dent, 1925.

Brown, D. The Naked Woman or a Rare Epistle sent to Mr. Peter Sterry, Minister. London, 1652.

Burton, R. The Anatomy of Melancholy. (London, 1621). London: Vernor, Hood, 1801.

Casaubon, M. A Treatise Concerning Enthusiasm. London, 1655.

Chandler, J. A Seasonable Word and Call to All Those called Ranters or Libertines. London, 1659.

Clarkson, L. The Pilgrimage of Saints. London, 1645. (Not extant?)

_______. Truth Released from Prison. London, 1646.

_______. A Generall Charge. London, 1647.

_______. A Single Eye. London, 1650.

_______. A jvstyficatjion of the mad Crew. London, 1650 (Published anonymously).

_______. Look About you for the Devil. London, 1659.

_______. The Quakers Downfal. London, 1659.

_______. The Right Devil Discovered. London, 1659.

_______. A Wonder of Wonders. London, before 1660. (Not extant?)

_______. The Lost Sheep Found. London, 1660.

3 _______. A Paradisical Dialogue. London, 1660.

Collins, I. and Reeve, T. Strange Newes from Newgate and the Old Baily. London, 1650.

Comber, T. Christianity No Enthusiasm. London, 1678.

Coppe, A. Some Sweet Sips of Some Spiritual Wine. London, 1649.

_______. A Fiery Flying Roll . . . with another Flying Roll ensuing. London, 1650.

_______. A Remonstance. London, 1651.

_______. Copps Return. London, 1651.

_______. A Character of a True Christian. London, 1680.

Couling, N. The Saints Perfect in this Life, or Never. London, 1647.

Crispe, T. Christ Alone Exalted. London, 1690.

Denison, S. The White Wolfe. London, 1627.

Donne, J. An Anatomie of the World. London, 1611.

Eaton, J. The Honeycombe of Free Justification. London, 1642.

Edwards, T. The First, Second, and Third parts of GANGRAENA. London, 1646.

Elton, E. Gods Holy Minde. London, 1648.

Everard, J. Some Gospel Treasures Opened. London, 1653.

_______. The Gospel Treasury Opened. London, 1657.

Farmer, R. The Great Mysteries of Godliness and Ungodlinesse. London, 1655.

Farn(s)worth, R. The Ranters Principles Discovered. London, 1655.

_______. "A letter to Jacob Bauthumley"; July 1654. MS at Friends' House, London.

Fell, M. Testimony of the Touchstone for all Professions and Forms. London, 1656.

Fisher, S. Baby Baptism Meer Babism. London, 1653.

Fowler, C. A Sober Answer. London, 1656.

4 Fox, G. *Journal*, revised text ed. by Norman Penny. London, 1911.

______. *Journal*, revised edition by John Nickalls. Cambridge, Mass. 1952.

______. *A Word from the Lord Unto all the faithless Generation of the World,&c*. No place. 1654.

Freeman, F. *Light vanquishing Darkenesse*. London, 1650.

Helmes, J. *The Familie of Love*. London, 1608.

Hickock, R. *A Testimony against the People called Ranters*. London, 1659.

Hobson, P. *A Garden Inclosed*. London, 1647.

Holland, J. *The Smoke of the Bottomlesse Pit*. London, 1651.

Hide, E. Jr. *A Wonder and yet no Wonder*. London, 1651.

H., G. *The Declaration of John Robins the False Prophet*. London, 1651.

I., G. *Truths Victorie against Heresie*. London, 1645.

Knewstub, I. *A Confutation of monstrous and horrible heresies taught by H.N.* London, 1579.

Lilly, W. *Anima Astrologiae*. London, 1676.

______. *Annus Tenebrosus*. London, 1652.

Long, T. *No Protestant but the Dissenters Plot*. London, 1682.

Milton. *Paradise Lost*. London, 1658-1665.

Muggleton, L. *The Acts of the Witnesses of the Spirit*. London, 1699.

Nicholas, H. *A Crying Voice of the Holy Spirit of Love*. London, 1648.

______. *An Introduction to the Holy Understanding of the Glasse of Righteousness*. Amsterdam? 1575?

______. *The Principall Epistles of H.N. which he hath set forth through the holy Spirit of Loue*. Amsterdam? 1575?

Pagitt, E. *Heresiography*. London, 1661 ed.

Perkins, W. *A Golden Chain*. London, 1591.

5 Powell, W. *A Summons for Swearers*. London, 1645.

Reading, J. *The Ranters Ranting*. London, 1650.

Rodgers, J. *The Displaying of an horrible secte of grosse and wicked heretiques naming themselves the Familie of Love*. London, 1578.

Rosewell, W. *The Serpents Subtilty Discovered*. London, 1656.

Ross, A. *Pansebeia*, or a view of all religions. London, 1664.

Roulston, G. *The Ranters Bible*. London, 1650.

Rutherford, S. *A Survey of the Spiritually Antichriste*. London, 1647.

Salmon, J. *Antichrist in Man*. London, 1647.

_______. *A Rout, a rout*. London, 1649.

_______. *Heights in Depths and Depths in Heights*. London, 1651.

Saltmarsh, J. *Free-Grace*. London, 1645.

Scobell, H. *A Collection of Acts and Ordinances of general use 1640-1656*. London, 1658.

Snow, S. *A Description of the Sect called the Familie of Love*. London, 1641.

Sterry, P. *The Spirit Convincing of Sinne*. London, 1645.

_______. *The Clouds in which Christ Comes*. London, 1648.

_______. *The Teachings of Christ in the Soul*. London, 1648.

_______. *The Commings Forth of Christ*. London, 1652.

_______. *England's Deliverance from the Northern Presbytery*. London, 1652.

_______. *A Discourse on the Freedom of the Will*. London, 1657.

_______. *The Way of God with his People in these Nations*. 1657.

_______. *The True Way of Uniting the People of God in these Nations*. London, 1660.

_______. *The Rise, Race, and Royalty of the Kingdom of God in the Soul of Man*. London, 1683.

_______. *The Appearance of God to Man in the Gospel*. London, published posthumously in 1710.

6 Stokes, E. *The Wiltshire Rant*. London, 1652.

Stubbs, T. *The Ranters Declaration*. London, 1650.

Sheppard, S. *The Joviall Crew, or the Devil turned Ranter*. London, 1651.

Taylor, J. *A Swarm of Sectaries*. London, 1641.

_______. *Ranters of Both Sexes*. London, 1651.

_______. *Religions Enemies*. London, 1641.

Tickell, J. *The Bottomlesse Pit Smoaking in Familism*. London, 1651.

Tilbury, S. *Bloody News from the North*. London, 1650.

_______. *The Ranting Adamites Declaration*. London, 1650.

Tobias, *Mirabilia opera Dei*: Certaine wonderfull Works of God which hapned to H.N. No place. 1575?

Underhill, T. *Hell Broke Loose*. London, 1660.

Vicars, J. *A Looking Glass for Malignants*.

Webbe, N. (with Grantham, W.) *The Ranters Reasons*. London, 1651.

Welde, T. *A Short Story of the Rise, Reign, and Ruine of the Antinomians*. London, 1644.

Whichcote, B. *Moral and Religious Aphorisms*. London, published posthumously ed. J. Jeffery 1703.

Williams, D. *Gospel Truth Stated and Vindicated*. London, 1692.

Williams, R. *The Bloody Tenant yet more Bloody*. London, 1652.

Winstanley, G. *A Vindication of those called . . . Diggers*. London, 1649.

Wood, A. à *Athenae Oxoniensis* (London, 1691-1692). London: Rivington, ed. of 1817.

Section B: Works published after 1700

Ashley, M. *The Stuarts in Love*. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1963.

Babb, L. Sanity in Bedlam: A Study of Robert Burton's Anatomy of Melancholy. Michigan State University Press, 1959.

______. The Elizabethan Malady: A Study of Melancholia in English Literature from 1580 to 1642. East Lansing; Michigan State College Press, 1951.

Bailey, M.L. Milton and Jacob Boehme. New York, 1914.

Bainton, R. Castellio: Concerning Heretics. New York; Columbia U. Press, 1935.

______. Studies on the Reformation. Boston; Beacon Press, 1963.

Barbour, H. The Quakers in Puritan England. New Haven, Conn: Yale U. Press, 1964.

Barclay, R. The Inner Life of the Religious Societies of the Commonwealth. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1876.

Bax, Belfort. The Rise and Fall of the Anabaptists. London: Swan Sonnenschein, 1903.

Braithwaite, W.C. The Beginnings of Quakerism. Cambridge, University Press, 1961.

______. The Second Period of Quakerism. Cambridge, University Press, 2nd. ed. 1961.

Brinton, H.H. The Mystic Will. New York: Macmillan, 1930.

Buckley, G.T. Atheism in the English Renaissance. Chicago, University Press, 1932.

Calendar of State Papers: 1640-1660. London; H.M. Stationery Office.

Cassirer, E. The Platonic Renaissance in England; tr. Pettegrove. Austin, Texas, U. of Texas Press, 1953.

Coffin, C.M. John Donne and the New Philosophy. New York: Columbia U. Press, 1937.

Cohn, N.S. The Pursuit of the Millennium. New York: Harper Torchbook, 2nd. ed. 1961.

Davies, G. The Early Stuarts 1603-1660. Oxford; Clarendon Press, 1937.

Gardiner, S.R. History of England, 1603-1642. London: Longmans Green, 10 vols. 1894-1896.

______. History of the Commonwealth and Protectorate, 1649-1656. New York: Ams. Press, 1965.

8 ______. *History of the Great Civil War, 1642-1649*. London: Longmans Green, 3 vols. 1886-1891.

Gerrish, B.A. *Grace and Reason: a study in the theology of Luther*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962.

Haller, W. and Davies, G. *Leveller Tracts 1647-1653*. New York: Columbia U. Press, 1944.

______. *Liberty and Reformation in the Puritan Revolution*. New York: Columbia U. Press, 1955.

______. *The Rise of Puritanism*. New York: Columbia U. Press, 1938.

Harris, V. *All Coherence Gone*. Chicago University Press, 1949.

Hill, C. *The Century of Revolution*. Edinburgh: Nelson, 1961.

______. *The English Revolution*. London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1940.

Huehns, G. *Antinomianism in English History, with special reference to the period 1640-1660*. London: Cresset Press, 1951.

Hunt, J. *An Essay on Pantheism*. London: Longmans, Green, 1866.

Hutin, S. *Les Disciples Anglais de Jacob Boehme*. Paris: Denoël, 1960.

Inge, W.R. *The Platonic Tradition, in English Religious Thought*. London: Longmans, 1926.

Jessope, A. *The Coming of the Friars*. New York: Putnam, 1892.

Jones, R. *Mysticism and Democracy in the English Commonwealth*. Cambridge, Mass. Harvard U. Press, 1932.

______. *Spiritual Reformers in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*. London: Macmillan, 1914.

______. *Studies in Mystical Religion*. London: Macmillan, 1909.

Jordan, W.K. *The Development of Religious Toleration in England*. Cambridge Mass. Harvard U. Press, four vols. 1938.

Kitteredge, G.L. *Witchcraft in Old and New England*. Cambridge, Mass. Harvard U. Press, 1929.

Knight, R. *George Fox, Founder of Quakerism: a psychological study of the mysticism of George Fox*. London, 1922.

Knox, R. *Enthusiasm*. New York: Oxford U. Press, 1950.

Mathew, D. *The Age of Charles I*. London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1951.

9 McMichael, J.R. The Life and Thought of William Walwyn: Seventeenth Century Englishman. New York: Doctoral Dissertation at Columbia U., 1965.

Michelet, J. Satanism and Witchcraft. New York: Citadel Press, 1960.

Mott, A. DeW. The Phenomenon of Ranterism in the Puritan Revolution: A Historical Study in the Religion of the Spirit 1640-1660. California: Doctoral Dissertation, U. of California, 1956.

Nicholson, M. The Breaking of the Circle. London: Oxford U. Press, rev. ed., 1960.

Nuttall, G.F. Richard Baxter. London: Thos. Nelson, 1965.

______. Studies in Christian Enthusiasm. Wallingford, Pa.: Pendle Hill, 1948.

______. The Holy Spirit in Puritan Faith and Experience. Oxford: Blackwell, 1946.

______. The Puritan Spirit. London: Epworth Press, 1967.

Otto, R. The Idea of the Holy, tr. by J.W. Harvey. Oxford: University Press, rev. ed., 1928.

Pawson, G.P.H. The Cambridge Platonists. London: S.P.C.K., 1930.

Pinto, V. de S. Peter Sterry, Platonist and Puritan. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1934.

Pollard, A.F. History of England from the Accession of Ed. VI to the Death of Elizabeth. London: Longmans Green, 1910.

Powicke, F.J. The Cambridge Platonists. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard U. Press, 1926.

Randall, J.H. The Making of the Modern Mind. New York: Houghton Mifflin, rev. ed., 1940.

Rhode, E. Psyche. London: Kegan Paul, 1925.

Runciman, S. The Medieval Manichee: A Study of the Christian Dualist Heresy. Cambridge University Press, 1947.

Rutt, J.T. (ed.). The Diary of Thomas Burton. London: Colburn, four vols., 1828.

Sabine, G.H. The Works of Gerrard Winstanley. Ithaca, New York: Cornell U. Press, 1941.

Scofield, G. The Ranters in Seventeenth Century England, Their Principles and Practices. Harvard: Doctoral Dissertation, 1949.

10 Sippell, T. Werdendes Quäkertum. Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1937.

Smith, P. A History of Modern Culture. New York: Holt, 1930.

Thune, N. The Behmenists and the Philadelphians. Uppsala, Almquist and Wiksells, 1948.

Troeltsch, E. The Social Teachings of the Christian Churches; O. Wyon. New York: Macmillan, 1931.

Tulloch, J. Rational Theology and Christian Philosophy in England in the Seventeenth Century. Edinburgh: Blackwood, 2nd. ed. two vols. 1874.

Tuveson, L. Millennium and Utopia. Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1954.

Westfall, R.S. Science and Religion in Seventeenth Century England. New Haven: R.I. Yale U. Press, 1958.

Whiting, C.E. Studies in English Puritanism from the Restoration to the Revolution, 1660-1688. London: S.P.C.K., 1931.

Willey, B. The Seventeenth Century Background. London: Chatto and Windus, 1934.

Williams, G. (ed.) Spiritual and Anabaptist Writers. London: S.C.M. Press, 1957.

_______. The Radical Reformation. Philadelphia; Pa: Westminster Press, 1962.

Zaehner, R.C. Mysticism Sacred and Profane. New York: Oxford U. Press (Galaxy) 1961.

Articles

Allen, G.W. "Boehme" in Hasting's Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics vol. II (1908), 778-784.

Bainton, R.H. "The Left Wing of the Reformation" in The Journal of Religion XXI (April, 1941), 124-134.

Bender, H.S. "The Anabaptist Vision" The Journal of Church History (March, 1944), 3-24.

Breward, I. "The Significance of William Perkins" in The Journal of Religious History IV, No. 2 (December, 1966), 113-128.

Hudson, W. "Mystical Religion in the Puritan Commonwealth" in The Journal of Religion XXVIII (January, 1948), 51-56.

11 Johnson, G.A. *"From Seeker to Finder: a study in Seventeenth Century English Spiritualism before the Quakers."* in *The Journal of Church History* XVII (December, 1948), 299-315.

Loofs, F. "Familisten" in *Realencyklopädie*, Leipzig: Schaff-Hertzog, V, 1898, 750-755.

Lloyd, A. "The Principles of the Ranters" in *Notes and Queries* CXC (April 6, 1946), 139-141.

Nippold F. "Heinrich Niclaes und das Haus der Liebe" in *Zeitschrift für die historische Theologie* XXXII (1862), 321-402.

Solt, L. "Anti-Intellectualism in the Puritan Revolution" in *The Journal of Church History* XXV (December, 1956), 303-316.

———. "John Saltmarsh: New Model Army Chaplain" in *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* II (April, 1951), 69-80.

———. "William Dell: New Model Army Chaplain" *Church Quarterly Review* CLV (January - March, 1954), 443-455.

Thomas, A.C. "The Family of Love, or the Familists, a study in Church History" *Haverford College Studies* 12 (1893), 1-46.

Williamson, G. "Mutability, Decay, and Seventeenth Century Melancholy" *Journal of English Literary History*, 2 (1935), 121-150.

Witley, W.T. "Enthusiasts, Religious" in *Hastings Encyclopadia of Religion and Ethics* V (1912), 316-321.

APPENDIX

From time to time in this work a few words have suggested that an analogy between Ranters and Hippies is possible. The likenesses between these groups of persons separated by three hundred years of time are striking but the analogy should not be pressed too hard.

To begin with, Hippies are, by and large, drawn from middle-class families, and are well educated. In both these characteristics they differ from Ranters. Next, their characteristic attitudes toward life are reinforced, and perhaps to some extent founded upon, the effects of psychedelic drugs that were not available to Ranters. But, in other ways, the similarity cannot be missed.

Hippies, like Ranters, manifestly have 'dropped out' from society at large. Though not numbering more than a few thousands, their groups are large enough, and their way of life colorful enough, to attract widespread attention--mostly highly and adversely critical. They have repudiated the society which gave them birth, but in a highly negative way. If defiance can be said to characterize their attitude, it must be noted that it is largely a passive defiance, a non-violent and pacifistic defiance.

Hippies consist, as Ranters did, of amorphous groups of persons who are characterized as a type and given their name by outsiders. In general it may be said that the term indicates persons, mostly young but some middle aged, who retreat from normal life with its customs, values, and goals, and choose instead to lead a formless existence in largely unorganized groups in which the norms of life are for the most part determined by each individual for himself. This way of life is not subject to the ordinary pressures of existence which prevail in a technical and urbanized civilization since the individual has no need to achieve anything. He does not provide for himself but, as Winstanley writes about the Ranters, relies upon others to feed him. Hippies pass their time together in a close group relationship and form a type of family. If they wish to go naked, they go naked. They desire to live freely and '*au naturel*'. Sexual life is unrestricted by traditional norms. A primitive communism permits all men and women to be 'in common'.

Hippies have fallen into a radically subjective life, in regard both to norms and values, and in their loss of the assurance that there is any objective truth about anything. There is no truth but what is true for me or for you. Their view of reality is solipsistic.

Thus, with the help of drugs, they seek first an inward encounter with the Real, and then to achieve the realization that the Real is Itself only in themselves and in all their Fellow Creatures. Extended consciousness helps them realize this more deeply. The goal is similar to that taught in the Upanishads, "*tat tvam asi*", ("That art Thou" or "Thou art That"). Hippies are often aware of this, and pseudo-Hinduistic, 3 pantheistic spirituality and aesthetic culture is popular among them.

Mortification, however, which is essential to the Hindu way, is not, for Hippies, the means of discovery any more than it was for Ranters. Uninhibited liberty of life--even to the extent of chaos--is their ethic. Yet there is one restraint: one must harm noone else, at least, not deliberately. Whereas a certain feeling for their fellow-creatures is evident, a sense of responsibility for others is, in general, not marked. Hippies will welcome those who wish to 'drop out' with them but they do not stop to consider the question of the novice's state of life or state of mind. And Hippies are quite sure that psychedelic drugs are good for all.

Their apparent absolute certainty about the rectitude of their point of view (a certainty reinforced by the effects of L.S.D. and methedrine) is similar to that of religious bodies. (Though perhaps their certainty is basically the conviction that all things are uncertain!)

Hippies are sick of the values of Society, and sick of its ills. They do not accept the metaphysics of the Judeo-Christian _Weltanschauung_ or its moral implications. They despise the gold of the rich as cankered, and the morality of conventional society as _bourgeois_.

Hippie communities hold together by means of fellow-feeling, expressed in their communism of goods and persons and in their indiscriminate 'love', butthey epitomize what was sung about the Ranters, ". . . let no mistaking come, for

4 they who love their liberty, in loving all love none."

They are strongly hedonistic, and hedonism is the resort of those who have despaired of ultimate values.

In all the respects just mentioned, Hippies and Ranters bear a strong similarity.

Further, Hippies are said to admire Thoreau who, like Walwyn and Winstanley, was a critic of his society and opted for his own way of life. Thoreau expressed a great love for nature, and believed in living 'naturally'. But then, Thoreau, like his seventeenth-century parallels, possessed a strong moral sense and a strong common-sense. His measured and temporary retreat from his parent society and its values was founded upon other positive and optimistic certainties, not upon negative and pessimistic ones.

It is also said in popular reports about Hippies that they seek the preservation of individuality, something that a Thoreau-type man also seeks. This object, however, seems hardly pursued in a serious manner since preservation of individualism calls for singular independence of mind and of way of life. The Hippie communities, on the contrary, call for a common life of non-responsibility, and of mutual interdependence: it is a paradox of asserted and dissolved personality. Drugs assist the latter element in the paradox.

What sort of persons become Hippies? Undoubtedly, many are sensitive and intelligent persons, but likely more sensitive than stable. Some, plainly, are of low intelligence, easily seduced by the gross simplifications and absolute certainties

5 which Hippiedom offers them. As we have already noticed, even intelligent persons, when under emotional stress, are moved to attitudes and conduct inconsistent with rationality.

Escapism, subjectivism, introversion--these are marks of the Hippies as of the Ranters. Such an one is an escaper from a harsher concept of reality.

Both movements of retreat, Hippie and Ranter, have arisen among circumstances of great conflict and massive change. The modern conflict between the two great contemporary ideologies, Communism and Capitalism, has something of a parallel in that between Catholicism (including the reformed Catholicism of the Church of England) and Protestantism. Catholicism has tended to promote autocracy and Protestantism democracy, and the seventeenth-century felt the political implications of this very deeply.[1]

The modern conflict, which has aroused strong feelings and profound doubts as to the right ends of society, has also been the cause of great fear and insecurity because of the militant forms the struggle has taken. As in the mid seventeenth century a deep uncertainty as to our own inner life has taken hold among many, an uncertainty aggravated by the weakened influence of the established religions. The uncertainty and secularism of the twentieth century is now widely appreciated, and seems to have resulted largely from the impact of scientific

---

[1] One refers to tendencies only. The Geneva experiment could hardly be called a movement toward democracy. But one would contend that the overall effect of Protestantism has been to promote democratic ways of life.

6 discovery upon religious verities, and to growing self-sufficiency and wealth in a large part of the world which has resulted in some form of materialism. Many have been touched by this materialism and scepticism, however unsought, and vainly seek for ways to revive and restimulate spiritual life with its certainty and its comfort. Since the Judeo-Christian ways of life in their traditional forms are losing their vitality and may fail to survive, it is natural that agitated and disturbed people should look in other directions. Behmenism is not currently in fashion but psychedelic "mysticisms" can fill that role. Mysticism and mysticality have obvious attractions since inward experience--whether or not fortified by self-hypnotic practices or by psychedelic drugs--is unassailable from the outside since it does not depend upon any external point of reference. The religio-political conflicts of mid-seventeenth-century England, together with the impact of the "New Philosophy," seems to have had such an effect upon those who became Ranters.

Perhaps the strongest point of difference in motivations between Ranters and Hippies lies in the apparent absence of a strong sense of religious guilt and fear of Hell among the latter. This plainly reflects both the reduced importance of, and difference in attitude of, the dominant religions of today. Perhaps the fear of meaninglessness has replaced fear of Hell; and social guilt--born of racial conflict--has replaced that born of the Decalog.

The definitive book about our modern social ills, of which the Hippies are a symptom, remains yet to be written.